SHORT STORIES

Down, down the stairs he rushed! He did not see the abyss at his very feet, and Lucilla was powerless to utter a warning cry.

(A Thrilling Episode from the Dramatic Story, "The Sins of the Fathers." See inside.)

No. 800. Week ending April 30, 1904.] [PRICE ONE PENNY.

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Short Stories

No. 800.] [One Penny.

For the Week Ending April 30th, 1904.

THE SINS OF THE FATHERS.

The Tale of a Deep-Laid Scheme of Revenge.

Containing the incident depicted on the cover.

The night was very dark. Even the feeble light of the crescent moon had been blotted out by great, grim masses of black cloud—sure heralds of the coming storm. The salt sea whispered weirdly, and the narrow strip of foreshore that separated it from the great cliffs hard by scarce showed the silver of its fine sand through the all-pervading darkness. Under the cliff stood a knot of men, talking in earnest whispers, and with heads close together. The deep, awesome stillness that heralds a storm made it expedient that their voices should be low. For the work they had to do demanded caution.

"They're late in coming," muttered the leader of the party. "Surely my information was correct."

He peered out to sea—a dark, determined face, with black eyes and square chin. But neither sight nor sound reached him. Minute after minute sped by, and still no sign of that for which they waited. But Preventive Officers were used to long night watches in those days, and Luke Rutherford and his men were regarded as one of the most vigilant and determined little bands along the coast.

A soft plash of muffled oars, followed by the sharp grate of a boat's keel upon the dark shore told the watchers their work was at hand. Each man looked to his weapons. There was a flash in the black eyes of Luke Rutherford that was not wholly due to his zeal in the service of King and Country. Another force was stirring within him to-night—a hope he dared not breathe to living man. Setting his teeth, he bade his men wait the signal of his first shot, and moved stealthily out from the black shadow of the overhanging cliff.

Four dark figures were bending low over the boat. No word was spoken. No sound broke the ominous stillness of the night.

As each figure rose erect some huge cask or bundle was lifted from the boat. But as yet no man moved. Each waited till his fellows had lifted their burdens from the boat.

Nearer and nearer crept Luke Rutherford, straining his eyes to catch a glimpse of the men as their faces showed through the brooding blackness. There was but one face of the four for which his dark eyes sought hungrily, greedily, revengefully.

Presently he saw it, and deliberately lifted his weapon to his shoulder. There was a flash, a cry of alarm from the surprised smugglers, an answering cry from the little band of Preventives in the dark shadow of the cliff, and—confusion!

Resistance was useless. The smugglers fled over the sand, pursued by the eager officers of the law, and amid a rattle of shots from the latter's rifles.

But Luke Rutherford remained behind. He had other work to do—work that was deadly, dastardly, fiendish—and he meant to do it.

Stepping down to the boat's side, he knelt on the dark sand by the prostrate figure of a man—the man he had shot. A bullet wound was in his chest—a wound that might or might not have been fatal. It was that doubt which Luke Rutherford meant to decide.

"Well," said he grimly, "so the time has come at last, Sam Snow! I warned you it *would* come."

The wounded man opened his eyes. He was a handsome young fellow, with a certain air of dash and recklessness that had won him the open admiration of many a fair inhabitant of Greycliffe. Even now, lying between life and death, the sound of a light laugh trembled on his lips.

"Oh, it's the fortune of the game," he said gaily, though the wound in his breast gave him great pain. "Besides, it mayn't be my last cargo after all, you know. I don't think it's incurable."

Luke Rutherford was reloading his gun. When he had finished, he let his eyes wander furtively around him. Finally they came back to the man on the sand.

"I'm going to make sure of that," he said hoarsely, and stood upright, his loaded weapon pointed at the man's heart.

Samuel Snow uttered an involuntary exclamation.

"In cold blood?" he gasped.

Luke Rutherford nodded.

"You hound!" muttered the helpless wretch. "Surely the law is satisfied!"

"Yes. But *I* am not."

"You!"

"Yes—I. For more than a year we two have had a hard and bitter fight for the love of Lucy Langton, and at last she has chosen you. I have never been thwarted in my life, and I will not be now."

There was a quick flash in the darkness, and the life of Samuel Snow, gay, careless, reckless, defiant, went out to

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meet the coming storm. Luke Rutherford moved away to meet the returning officers.

"I can easily account for the second shot," he muttered, "by affirming that he tried to stab me. He had a knife in his hand."

As he disappeared a dark form rose from the sand on the other side of the boat. It was the figure of a man, and came cautiously round and knelt down by the body of the dead man.

"So he killed my brother in cold blood!" he muttered hoarsely. "Well, *his* reckoning shall come too. And if my vengeance falls not on him, it shall fall upon his children in the time to come. It's lucky I dropped down unseen by the side of the boat, or this deed might have gone unrequited. Oh, that I had had a weapon with which to strike him to the earth in his cold-blooded, murderous purpose! But he shall pay the penalty. And if I find no way to avenge you, my brother, I will teach my sons to hate his sons, till some time the day of reckoning will come and you shall be avenged."

The sound of voices reached his ears and he crept stealthily away over the dark sand and was lost to view.

* * * * * * *

David Snow, house and estate agent in the town of Greycliffe, sat moodily gazing into the fire that blazed on the broad hearth in his well-furnished sitting-room. He was a prosperous-looking, middle-aged man—dark almost to swarthiness, and with a vague indication of something in his clean-shaven face that made him feared rather than loved.

The door opened and his son entered the room. A greater contrast could not have been imagined than was presented by these two. For Sydney Snow was fair, with frank, open brow and clear blue eyes. His cheery, genial smile was as ready as his quick wit and gaiety of heart. But to-day the world had gone awry, and a shadow saddened the generally genial face. His father noted the look and rallied him upon the fact.

"Why so sad, Sydney?" he said banteringly. "If I didn't know you better, lad, I should imagine you had been crossed in love."

Sydney threw himself into a chair.

"You've hit it!" he said, with an attempt at a laugh. "That's just the trouble. And the worst of it is, there's no help for it."

David Snow started. There was a queer light in his dark eyes that was not intelligible to his son.

"Who's the girl?" he asked shortly.

Sydney hesitated for just one moment. Then he answered the question.

"Lucilla Merton."

He was looking out of the window now, and did not see that the look on his father's face had deepened to an expression of bitterest hatred. And when he turned his head again the look had vanished.

"Ah," murmured David Snow, and the ejaculation seemed to come from between set teeth. "The fair guest of Mrs. Rutherford and her son Rex. Blows the wind in that quarter, my son? Well, I'm sorry. But don't despair."

Sydney made a wry face.

"That's the worst of it," he said, affecting a carelessness of tone he did not feel. "It's Rex Rutherford who has cut me out."

David Snow's dark face was now well under control.

"Quite so," he said coolly. "It's not the first occasion of the two families coming into collision. My uncle Samuel and his grandfather were rivals. The former was a smuggler, the latter a Preventive Officer, and—well, my uncle was accidentally shot one dark night down by the shore. My father was present, and he related the incident so graphically to me on his death-bed that I have never forgotten it. So once more the old rivalry springs up, and the feud is renewed! Truly history repeats itself."

He rose from his seat and laid his hand affectionately on his son's shoulder. The hand was firm and steady as a rock.

"Don't lose heart," he counselled. "There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip, you know."

But Sydney found little comfort in the old adage, and, turning abruptly, he left the room. His father watched him as he went out. When the door had closed, his face again darkened, till its aspect was truly terrible.

"Not yet," he muttered, "not yet is the murder of my uncle avenged! But the hour is drawing near. I have waited—waited to see if I were destined to mete out justice to his race—the race of that cold-blooded murderer, Luke Rutherford. And Fate is answering me. Upon me the duty devolves. This rivalry is but a trivial thing, but a straw shows which way the wind blows. It is not for my son—though God knows how dear he is to me—that I take this duty to myself.

"My father made me swear that, should Fortune favour me and circumstances lead me on, I would avenge the murder of his dead brother. And now—now—all things point to the execution of that vengeance. I have plotted for it—schemed and worked to bring it about.

"The trump card is now in my hand. For Rex Rutherford and his mother live in the very house wherein my father and his men were wont to conceal their contraband goods. He deemed me a fool for letting the house so cheap. But he little dreams how significant was the apparently benevolent smile with which I answered his unspoken surprise."

He was smiling now. But the smile was not indicative of benevolence. The black eyes were flashing, the swarthy face dark with revengeful menace. But the white, strong hands were steady and firm. It was clear that, once imbued with a set resolve, David Snow was not the man to waver or falter in fulfilling that purpose to the very uttermost.

* * * * * * *

The Rutherfords were at breakfast. The household was a small one, consisting only of mother and son. Lucilla Merton was their guest, and Sydney Snow's suspicion that she was not wholly indifferent to handsome Rex Rutherford was not very wide of the truth.

Mrs. Rutherford was the daughter of the famous Preventive Officer. She had married a cousin, thereby retaining her name, but was now a widow. Rex was her only son, and she loved him with all a mother's fondness. Her eyes were not shut to the secret of the two young people—a secret which, as yet, had not been verbally confessed—and the knowledge pleased her not a little. For she loved this sweet girl almost as dearly as she did her own son, while Lucilla warmly reciprocated the feeling.

"Where are you young people going this morning?" inquired Mrs. Rutherford, beaming upon them in turn. "It is such a bright, sunny day that it seems positively sinful to remain indoors."

"Then why not come with us?" asked Rex.

But Mrs. Rutherford shook her head. Her intuitive sense of perception advised her to decline that pleasure.

"No," she said decisively, "I have so many things to do."

Lucilla looked up.

"Then let me stay and help you," she said.

But Mrs. Rutherford only smiled and shook her head.

"My dear," she said, "when you are as old as I am, you will have discovered that you cannot intrust certain little domestic tasks to the care of even the dearest friend in the

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world. It is the ultra-preciseness of mature years—and—and it is silly—silly and conceited. Yet there it is, and what is one to do?"

She sighed with a comic assumption of injury, at which both Rex and Lucilla laughed.

"Well," said Rex, as the two ladies rose from the table, "I thought of taking Miss Merton to see the ruins of Dane's Castle. The drive will be delightful."

He turned inquiringly to Lucilla.

"Oh, that will be lovely!" she said enthusiastically. "I have often wanted to see the old castle."

So Rex went off to see about the dog-cart, and in less than a quarter of an hour he was round at the front door, the reins in his hand, waiting for her to come out. She looked very sweet and charming as she stood on the steps by the side of his mother. One little foot on the step of the dog-cart, one little hand tightly clasped in his, and she was up on the seat beside him. His mother was smiling at them as they drove away, and the soft Spring air fanned their faces with its perfumed breath.

The drive was a long one, yet all too short. And when it ended, they wandered among the old, time-worn ruins and let their recollections glide back to old historic days, when the now crumbling castle was tall and stately and impregnable. But when they left the ruins and wandered out among the shady woods the present came back to them anew, and they looked into each other's eyes. The look was a revelation to both, and Rex stood still.

"Lucilla," he whispered, "is it possible? Is there any hope for me? Will you be my wife?"

And Lucilla's eyes drooped as she breathed the answer:

"Yes."

Rex took her two hands and pressed them to his lips.

"Oh!" he whispered rapturously. "And I thought you were getting to care for Mr. Snow!"

Lucilla smiled.

"He was not so short-sighted," she said. "He is a nice young fellow, and I like him very much—as a friend. But ——" And once more she lifted those eloquent eyes to his face.

"And you loved me all the time?" he persisted, drawing her nearer to him under the great shady trees.

Lucilla pouted.

"You are very inquisitive, sir," she said.

But Rex had caught her in his arms and was raining kisses on the red, ripe lips.

"If only you love me one half as dearly as I do you," he said passionately, "I shall be more than content."

It was dusk when the dog-cart took them home to Greycliffe. And once more the drive was long, yet tantalisingly short. For time flies quickly when love is near.

* * * * * * *

Once more the night was very dark. The lapse of sixty years had made no appreciable difference to sea or cliff. But to-night the wind was high and the rain descending in hissing sheets that mingled with the salt spray of the broken white surf and dashed against the rocky walls of Greycliffe. It was a night to seek the shelter of one's own fireside.

Yet one was out in that whirling tempest of wind and sea and rain—a man, fighting the elements, and groping his way along the dark wall of the cliff. Ever and anon he paused and touched with his hand the black rock beside him, as though searching in the dense darkness for something he knew to be there.

At last he touched a great square ledge, upon the soil of which grew a few stunted tufts of grass. The cliff was less perpendicular here, and he mounted the ledge, with his face to the wall, and felt still farther up for a projecting spur of rock. Finding it, he put forth all his strength and drew himself up by it till again his free hand touched something in the cliff side. An iron ring this time, concealed by rank grasses, and once more he drew himself up. Not without care had he studied the old map of the cliff handed down to him by his father.

Sixty years before many had whispered that the Greycliffe smugglers carried their contraband wares to a great cave in the cliff side. But none had ever discovered it, and the rumour had been discredited. But the cave did exist, and David Snow knew the track by which it might be reached.

Slowly and painfully he toiled up the steep cliff side, his hands bleeding, his breath coming in long, laboured gasps. For the lapse of years had made the access almost impracticable, and several of the cunningly concealed stepping-stones had been worn away. Still on he toiled, till he was some sixty feet above the sand below.

The face of the cliff at this point was jagged and torn. Great rocks projected out in shapeless confusion. Some were almost hidden from view by others set before them, and towards this mass of rock David Snow was steering. At length he reached it, and, lifting himself suddenly up, dropped among the rocks and disappeared.

"It's work for a Hercules!" he said under his breath, as he groped with his hands among the débris between the great black rocks. "But I'm on the right track now!"

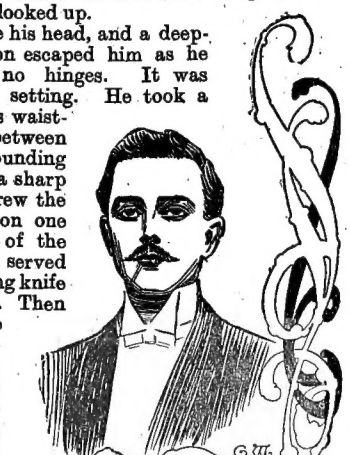
As he spoke, he lifted a square boulder from a hole in the ground—then another, and another, till a dark chasm opened at his very feet. Without a moment's hesitation he let his feet slip down this abyss. His faith in the veracity of his fathers left nothing to be desired.

A drop of ten feet brought him to the bottom, and he instantly kindled a small lantern which he had brought for that purpose. A narrow tunnel or cutting ran through the cliff and away from the sea. It was very shallow and he had to stoop to traverse it. The air, too, was fœtid, and once or twice he was almost overpowered. But he took a pull at the flask in his pocket, and, saturating a handkerchief with the spirit, he tied it over his mouth and nostrils.

On he went through the heart of the great cliff, till he stood under the town itself. The houses of the inhabitants were above him, and a grim smile crossed his dark face as he thought of them, asleep in their beds, and wondered as to what they would think could they but see him, the prosperous landowner, torn and bleeding, deep down beneath their very feet. Still on he toiled, holding his dark lantern high against the roof of the tunnel, till a great square hole opened above his head and he knew that his journey was now almost accomplished.

Extinguishing the light of his lantern, he returned it to his pocket and felt round the great hole above him for what he knew should be there. Yes, there it was—a roughly-constructed ladder of iron piping set in the wall of the well. Lifting himself up, he set his foot on the first rung. It stood his weight, and he began to mount. The rungs were far apart, and he counted them as he ascended. Eighty-two! The ladder ended and he looked up.

A trap-door was above his head, and a deep-drawn sigh of satisfaction escaped him as he saw it. There were no hinges. It was simply dropped into its setting. He took a long, keen knife from his waist-belt, and thrust it up between the trap and the surrounding woodwork. There was a sharp rasping sound, and he drew the knife along the crack on one side of the trap. Two of the three remaining sides he served in a similar manner, his long knife rasping sharply as it went. Then he put one hand to the trap and pushed vigorously. It yielded, and, gripping the floor into which it had been set, he lifted himself up, taking care that the displaced trap should make no noise.



One violent effort, and he stood upon his feet.

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It was dark, terribly dark. Yet he knew well where he was. He was standing at the foot of the stairs in the hall of Mrs. Rutherford's house—the house of the smugglers, which he had let to Rex Rutherford at so ridiculously low a rental. The hall had been covered with stout linoleum at his own expense before the Rutherfords had taken possession of the house, and through this his long, keen knife had cut its way.

* * * * * * *

Lucilla Merton awoke with a start. A vague premonition of impending disaster caused her to sit upright in bed. The room was in darkness. No sound was to be heard save the tumult of the storm without. The household were asleep, and all was silent and still.

Yet something had seemed to rouse her from sleep and warn her of coming danger. What was that? She caught her breath and listened. A sharp, scraping, rasping sound in the hall below.

For a moment she hesitated, debating as to what she should do. The noise might be nothing, and she was loth to arouse Rex for fear this should be the case. He had a horror of the unduly-timid, ultra-nervous, hysterical sort of woman, and Lucilla had never been guilty of cowardice in her life.

Slipping noiselessly to the floor, she first lit the gas-jet in her room and then attired herself in dressing-gown and slippers. She would go quietly down to the hall and see if anything were amiss. She was not afraid of the dark, so took no light, and went softly down the winding stairs to the hall below. She heard no one stirring as she descended.

But someone was waiting for her—waiting in the dense darkness that hid her from view.

David Snow was standing by the hole in the floor, his foot on the lowermost stair. His quick ear had caught the sound of slippered feet on the stairs above. The footfall was a woman's—of that he was sure. What should he do? It might be Lucilla. If so, he must not harm her for his son's sake. Had she heard him? He frowned angrily as he saw all his plans thus complicated. Ten short minutes and he would have been in Rex Rutherford's room. And another knife, longer and keener than the one he had as yet used, would have descended over his victim's heart, and thus the murder of Samuel Snow would have been avenged.

Even now he must do it. But he must dispose of the girl first.

Nearer and nearer she came. He put out his arms. One step more, and she would have gone headlong into that yawning abyss. But his right arm was about her waist, his left hand pressed tightly over her mouth. To struggle in so firm a grip was futile.

With scarcely a sound he carried her along the hall, and, still with one hand upon her mouth, laid her upon the floor. Then he searched through his pockets and produced some cord which he had brought in case of emergency.

The girl was struggling violently, but he put all his weight upon her and she sank back exhausted. Then, in a flash, he slipped the handkerchief from his own mouth and bound it tightly round hers. Next came the two arms, which were even now striking at him in a frantic, desperate struggle for freedom. Close under the elbows he bound them, passing the cord round her slim waist. Lastly he bound the two ankles tightly together, winding the ends of the cord round the base of a great old-fashioned umbrella-stand that was screwed to the wall, so that she could not rise or even crawl across the floor.

All this was done in absolute darkness, and Lucilla knew nothing concerning her assailant.

In a vague sort of way, she attributed the presence of the unknown to motives of robbery. And she could give no warning to her lover! The thought maddened her, and she made one more desperate fight for liberty. The handkerchief slipped from her mouth. A cry was on her lips. But its utterance was checked almost instantly, and the handkerchief was drawn with painful tightness about the bloodless lips.

But that half-uttered cry had not passed unheard. The sound of a door opening in a room above caught the ear of David Snow. A few moments' breathless suspense and he heard another foot upon the stair. It was a man's this time, and the light of a candle flickered above his head. What should he do?

Reviling his ill-luck, he slipped his feet down upon the topmost rung of the pipe ladder in the well. Down, down he went, rung after rung, till he was out of reach of that approaching light.

Then he stopped and peered upwards to the mouth of the well, waiting, waiting, for what?

Rex Rutherford was turning the last bend in the stairs. In an instant his eye lit on the figure of Lucilla, bound and gagged, in the hall below.

With a cry of horror and alarm, he plunged forward.

Lucilla strove wildly to cry to him to stop ere it was too late.

Down, down he came, the abyss he did not see yawning at his very feet.

Lucilla's blood froze with horror, but she was powerless. One step—a cry—and Rex Rutherford went hurtling down the gaping well into the smugglers' tunnel.

But he did not go alone. He who openly defies the mandate of God and metes out vengeance to whom he will is in danger of a similar judgment.

Cold and grey dawned the morning. And when at last poor Lucilla Merton was found and rescued, the chilly horror of the long, dark silence that had preceded the dawn had bereft her of consciousness. But grief and misery do not long remain in abeyance. Strong, rough-mannered men shrank back in horror at the story she had to tell. Slowly they descended the yawning hole in the floor of the hall. It seemed an age ere they reappeared; and when they came they led her away, that she might not see their ghastly burdens. But later she slipped upstairs and entered the darkened room that Rex had left but a few short hours before. There he lay, his face so pale in its last, long sleep, yet with a smile upon it, as though a glimpse of futurity had been vouchsafed him ere he died. Mrs. Rutherford was sitting by the bed, her eyes swimming with tears. But at sight of Lucilla she rose, and drew the girl's head down upon her shoulder.

"My poor child!" she whispered brokenly. "We have naught in all the world now but each other."

Lucilla's lip quivered.

"God's will be done!" she murmured. "But it is so hard—so very, very hard, for—I—loved him so!"

So they comforted each other, there in the presence of the dead, whom both had loved.

And afterwards? Ah, that rests with the future! Sydney Snow, frank, kindly, generous to a degree, had also passed through the dark waters of tribulation. His father's purpose came home to him in a flash, and the shock sent him staggering to his room like a drunken man. But the years are passing, and time is patching up the wound it can never quite heal. Lucilla still calls him her friend, for her intimacy with him is not diminished because of his father's sin. The sins of the fathers have been visited upon the children. All the old hatred is dead. And who knows? It is better to love than to hate.

Walter J. Mowbray.

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That Obstinate Juror. . .

Telling how he Scored in the End.

A SOMEWHAT humble cottage in Canada it was, but picturesque, with odd little porches and with the spray of purple clematis clinging about them, where the butterflies all day long loved to unfurl their silken wings. In the little garden tall spires of scarlet hollyhocks stood up in brave ranks, and the grass was bordered thick with violets in the Springtime.

Mrs. Gordon felt very happy on this sunny June afternoon. It was the anniversary of her wedding day, and memory went back to that bright epoch in her life. She saw herself—a slim girl in her white dress—standing up before the altar, uttering with a very quick-beating heart the vows that made her John Gordon's wife.

"They always speak of happy brides," she thought, "but what was that happiness to what I feel now that I have tested and tried his love for six years? Dear John! He was my ideal then; now I know him to be the truest and best—a heart for mine to lean and rest upon.

And the little woman went about her task of gathering flowers to decorate her rooms for the day with infinite content.

She was not going to celebrate it by inviting anyone. Oh, no! It would be much happier for them to be alone with the little ones, to talk over old times, to sing the old songs, to recall the dreary days before they had met—were not all days alike dreary before that sweet time? To build castles for the future, to thank God at last for His infinite mercy, and beg His blessing on the days to come.

So little Mrs. Gordon, a very pretty woman—indeed, more lovely, John thought, than the slim girl who stood by him that day at the altar—danced about the house like a child, as she made it look as gay as possible for the festive occasion.

Aunt Zeph, who rejoiced in the festive name of Zephyrina, looked in, with an excessively gay turban on her woolly head. She had nursed Mrs. Gordon as a child, and felt like one of the family.

"Dat's a splendenferos flower-show, Miss Ju," she said, showing her white teeth; "but what I wants to talk to you 'bout is dem dar chicken. Did I understand you to say you wanted dem dar chicken boiled?"

"Well, won't that be nice?" asked Mrs. Gordon, absently regarding the damask roses she held in her hand.

"What, libed under my cookin' so long, Miss Ju, and talk o' boiling little young chickens—innercent little babies like dem!"

"All right, just as you like."

"Roasting is the properest manner o' cookin' tender young chickens, Miss Ju—and 'pears like you never would take any weight an' 'sponsibility. Here I's bin a strivin' dis six years to put dat ar gumption inter you—which is becomin' to your new sphere of action—an' now you talk of boiling. Go away."

"Well, you know, Aunt Zeph, I never shall learn while you rule—and no one can beat you."

"Humph! I reckon not. Dem chickens will be roasted—I know what Marse John likes."

"I believe it was your roasted chickens that captivated him," laughed Mrs. Gordon; "he knew if he married me he would secure you, and he couldn't do that in any other way."

Aunt Zeph looked very knowing, but a broad smile illumined her face.

"'Spec' he wasn't blind to the adwantages of de persition," she said. "Takin' you and me together, Miss Ju—we'se hard to beat."

And then, with a self-satisfied laugh, she left the room to superintend the cooking of the chickens.

Mrs. Gordon looked at the clock—her husband was late.

"And he said he'd be early this afternoon, so that we could take a long, lingering walk—a lover's walk," she said, with a little pout of the fresh red lips; "but, then, it's the anniversary of Mr. Ridgewell, too—the manager of the bank; perhaps there is some extra work, and John is always so obliging. They have been married twenty-five years. I wonder if we shall love each other after such a long time as well as now. But why not better?—and then Lil will be a woman and married perhaps, and little Max will have gone out into the world to fight his own battles—both my little nestlings flown. Oh, I can't bear to think of it! Why, there's John!"

Yes, John was coming down the garden-walk, and she sprang out to meet him. But before she reached him she noticed a troubled look on his face.

"You have not got a holiday face on," she said. "Now you must look exactly as happy as you did six years ago when you came for me."

"Must I?" with an effort at a smile.

"Something has happened, John," she said, nestling up to him, and putting her hands on his arm.

"Yes, my darling; the safe was opened last night and the bank robbed of ten thousand pounds."

"Oh, John, how dreadful! But don't let that spoil our evening. We can't help it."

"No, but——"

"But what? Have I not broken you yet, in all these six years, of stopping in the middle of a sentence?"

"I was going to say that—— How can I tell you, dear, you look so happy?"

"I shall be miserable now till you tell me."

"Well, you know there are two keys to the safe. I have one—Mr. Ridgewell the other."

"Yes."

"The natural inference is that one of those keys must have been used."

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"Well?" exclaimed the little wife, still blind to the drift of the thing.

"Of course, no one believes Mr. Ridgewell robbed his own bank, so, you see, the inference will be——"

The soft bloom paled on Mrs. Gordon's cheek, and she clasped her husband's arm as if she were afraid of falling.

"It can't be—that they suspect you?"

"I think so," faltered John Gordon, with some bitterness. "I fancied men looked askance at me as I came home. Mr. Ridgewell said, pointedly, before them all:

"'There are two keys. I suppose no one suspects me of the robbery?' and then there was a storm of negatives. I said, 'I have nothing to go on but my good name. I hope no one believes I am a thief?' And, oh, Juliet, I shall never suffer more, not even if it comes to going to prison, than I did during that dreadful moment while I waited for someone to speak up for me! There was a silence, and then someone said, 'It looks very black.' I almost expected to be arrested on the spot."

"Oh, John, I cannot bear it—on our wedding day, too," sobbed his wife.

"Yes, and it is *his* wedding-day also. I saw that they were making great preparations as I came past."

"You do not suspect him?"

"Certainly not; it is a mystery; it might have been opened with a false key."

Little Lil came in, splendid in blue ribbons and embroidery.

"Mamma, mamma!" she cried, "must Max catch a bee to get his honeycomb, and does he wear his honeycomb on his head, mamma?"

"No, no! Tell him not to touch a bee. It will sting him!" exclaimed Mrs. Gordon.

John had gone on to the flowery porch, and sat down with a glance at the little paradise where trouble and sorrow had never yet entered.

As he looked he saw it entering now. Through the little white gate came the village constable, Phil Weatherby, in a very reluctant manner.

He came towards the little vine-wreathed porch deprecatingly. He was a good friend, and never hated his business as he hated it at this moment.

He could not speak.

"Am I sent for?" asked John; and at the words his wife sprang to his side with a cry.

Weatherby touched his helmet to the lady.

"It's the worst job I ever did," he said. "I'd rather anyone would knock me down; but the plain fact is that you're accused of the Westport Bank robbery, and I've got to arrest you."

"All right, Weatherby; I know you're a friend," said John calmly.

His wife was sobbing and clinging to him.

"Don't, my love, don't!" he whispered. "You believe in God. Try to have faith that He will bring out my innocence."

Aunt Zeph now appeared with an important air.

"Dem ar chickens is jes' done to a turn, and dar's no sense in waitin' another minute, or dey'll spile."

"Oh, John, come and eat something! You have been gone all day."

John looked at the constable.

"Come," he said, "you can keep me in sight."

"There's no objection," said Weatherby, looking as if he would be glad to escape through a knot-hole.

"Won't you take something with us?" faltered Mrs. Gordon.

"'Twould choke me to death!" exclaimed the rough man, whose heart was in the right place

No one ate anything. John had merely agreed to go through the form for the sake of his wife, and to put off the evil moment of his leaving her; but, like all evil moments, it came at last.

The constable felt an uncomfortable dimness in his eyes when, after a close embrace, John Gordon put his half-fainting wife down on a sofa and turned to go with him.

"The law's a cruel thing," he said.

"Yes—and blind!" answered John Gordon, bitterly; "for a man's whole life counts for nothing."

* * * *

It was noon on the first of July—a hot, sultry noon, in the little bare, white-washed room to which the jury had withdrawn to settle the verdict. The men looked at one another as they came in.

"It's only a form," said one. "I reckon we're all of one mind. It wouldn't have looked well not to have come out at all."

"Yes, 'twon't take long," said another. "Let's take a ballot."

"Hullo," said the spokesman of the party, John Sawyer, a tall, lank, patent-medicine man, "here's a go. Well, Mr. Barton, ef you kin say 'not guilty' in the face of all that evidence, then the English language ain't got no meanin' for you."

Frank Barton smiled quietly. He was the only gentleman of the party, and was regarded with a little envy accordingly. He was also engaged to Ethel Ridgewell, the bank manager's only daughter. Still, on the jury he only counted one, and his vote was no better than another.

"Would you like me jest to give you a sighnopsis of them there argyments?" said Sawyer, edging up to the recalcitrant juror. "Jest to freshen you up a bit?"

"No," answered Frank coolly. "I heard them."

"An' warn't convinced? Phew!"

"I don't think Gordon's guilty."

"Why?"

"Oh, I can't say why, but I don't."

The men looked at each other. One began to whistle. Another took out a knife and a piece of wood, and commenced making a boat for his little boy.

Sawyer began scribbling on a piece of paper. He looked very gloomy.

"It's a boilin' day," he muttered.

"Yes, werry 'ot I calls it," said one, an Englishman working in the mills.

"I mean to say that at my establishment this is the day for boilin' the wonderful compound that I call the 'Life Prolonger,' and one of my apprentices has a conviction that morphine and soda is identical. If there's wholesale murder done in Westport, Mr. Barton, who's to answer fur it?"

Frank didn't answer. He was staring out of the little window where there was a glimpse of green fields and a bowery bit of woods in the distance. The room was like an oven, the black flies crawled languidly on the ceiling.

"Let's try it again," said one desperately.

Same result—one "not guilty" among all the rest.

"By Jove!" cried Sawyer in dismay. "I counted on bein' home at that boilin'."

"Have you got any reasons for standing out?" asked one. "It isn't nature to do things without a reason."

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"Well, I don't know as I have what you'd consider a reason," answered Frank, "but I have convictions. I think the man's innocent, and I cannot go against my convictions, you know."

The long, hot afternoon wore away. A soft breeze began to steal in at the little window. The hearts of the tired jurymen began to turn fondly to thoughts of home. It was more than human nature could endure to see that obstinate, unreasonable fellow sitting serenely by the window, and smoking a cigarette with such a placid expression. They were all getting angry.

"Look here, this is a downright imposition!" cried one. "Keepin' us all because you haven't the brains to take in evidence."

Frank's smile of superiority was maddening.

"A jury is generally selected for want of brains," he said. "How else could they get men who didn't have any opinion?"

Another silence, and then Sawyer said:

"I expect that Life Prolonger is drawed off now. Five hundred bottles, and who knows what mistakes them 'prentices has made; but I could still set things right if I could get home to-night. Of all obstinate critters, *you* take the cake!"

Silence for another hour, and then supper was served and they were locked in.

"Now, look here, you've got to hear that evidence agin," shouted Sawyer. "I can't sleep, and so I'll deliver the charge. If you don't like it, help yourself."

This was greeted with applause, and then Sawyer mounted the table and gave the whole case at length.

Frank resigned himself.

"Almost persuaded, eh?" asked one, when the agony was over. "Let's take another ballot."

Frank was very tired. The hot room, the uncongenial company were telling on him, and he might be roving along fragrant paths with Ethel. The moonlight was going all to waste, for they were not together.

Still he wrote "Not guilty" as before, and heard several smothered imprecations.

"Most audacious!" cried the Englishman.

"If you would give the least reason for your doubts," said another.

"Well, gentlemen," answered Frank, candidly, "it seems to me a man's good character might be a just reason for doubt; but I don't mind telling you one thing more."

"All right!" cried several.

"I happened to be passing Gordon's cottage the evening before the robbery. The windows and doors were open, and I could see the little family. They were at prayers. Mrs. Gordon sat with a pretty little yellow-haired lassie at her side. He held his boy on his knee. He has a fine, sonorous voice, and it was a still summer night. He was reading from the Bible, and as I passed I heard these words, 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?'"

Frank paused. There was a silence in the company.

"I think a man who contemplated robbing a bank that night would not have read those words. Whenever I am tempted to think him guilty that picture of the family at worship rises before me. I believe he is a good man. I think him incapable of this crime, and I shall stand by my convictions."

There was a firmness about the young man's tone that gave the rest of the jurors a hopeless feeling. Day dawned and wore away again.

"They'll have to have a new trial," sighed the quack doctor, "and the sooner the better."

At night, when the food was brought, Frank found there was a basket of fruit for him, smuggled in by some special favour. His heart beat faster, for he knew it was from Ethel. There was a little note between the folds of the napkin which he managed to read while the others were dozing.

"My Own Darling Frank,—*I did not know you could be so obstinate. You make me afraid! I hear you are standing out against all the others. Don't you think it's a little conceited? Papa seems very angry about it, and says hard things. Oh, I hope this may not make him more unfriendly than he has been! He acts as if you were giving him a personal insult. But, my own Frank, I shall never let anything come between us, and I am glad—glad you will not act against your conscience. If you believe Gordon is innocent, stick to it, and believe that I will stand by you for ever—against all the world.*—"Ethel Ridgewell."

Ethel came out into the hall, when a rough-looking man addressed her.

Frank read this note over several times, and it acted like a cordial to him, in spite of the uneasy feeling it gave him to hear that Ethel's father was taking his position as a personal affront.

He was worn out with the discomforts of the time, but he took a new resolve that moment. Never would he have a voice in condemning an innocent man. He fell into a miserable sleep after that resolution.

* * *

There was a gay party in the Ridgewell's mansion that night. It was Ethel's birthday; albeit she had never felt less like rejoicing that she had been born. Somehow the atmosphere had felt heavy all day.

In the morning she had seen poor little Mrs. Gordon go by, looking pale and haggard, and it gave her a pang. Then when she had mentioned it to her

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father, he had stormed at her in an unusual manner, and had made some very disagreeable remarks about Frank, that had brought the tears to her eyes.

She hated to have any gaiety while her lover was shut up in those dismal precincts; but she was forced to superintend everything, for her mother was an invalid.

She could not help looking very pretty as she stood in the drawing-room to receive the guests. She wore a cream-hued brocade and pearls, and looked very charming with her blue forget-me-not eyes, and the soft flush on her cheek.

But her heart was far away from the scene, although she played her part very well. She was in reality with her lover in the dreary, whitewashed room, trying to realise all his discomforts.

At last the supper came, and as the gay couples filed into the dining-room, Ethel missed her father.

Her mother, who could scarcely endure the slightest extra exertion, had sought an ante-room for a few moments' repose.

A loud knock at the door startled her. Some very late and fashionable party, perhaps. She went to receive them, but no one entered. They seemed to be having words with John in the hall.

Ethel looked out.

"What is the matter?" she said.

A rough-looking man stepped forward.

"Sorry to inconvenience you, miss, but business is business."

"Well, what's your business?" she asked, with a fast-beating heart.

"It's with your father," answered the man.

"I was just going to look for him," said Ethel, "and if you will wait—— "

"Oh, bless yer 'art, we've got this 'ere job; we must put it through!" cried his companion. "You know if he suspects he might run away."

Ethel stared at them in utter bewilderment, which the first speaker seemed to understand.

"Sorry to interrupt jollity, as I goes in fer it myself when I gits a chance. 'Now's the time,' I says to Jim, as the folks are at their grub, and we can do our little job without kicking up a row."

"But what is it?" cried Ethel, thoroughly alarmed.

"A little writ of arrest."

"For what?"

"A wery 'eavy defalcation, as they calls it"

Like an electric flash the truth was revealed to the terrified girl. She tottered back, and would have fallen but for the servant's help.

"Where is papa?" she faltered.

"I seen him go inter the library," said John; "but I wasn't going to disturb him for them."

"We'll have to disturb him now," said one of the men.

"I'll show you the way," cried the young girl, regaining her composure.

They followed her along the hall till she stopped at a certain door.

She hesitated a moment, her heart was beating so fast.

A man stepped before her and softly opened the door, as if to take the inmate unawares. Mr. Ridgewell did not seem to hear them. He did not turn his head. He sat in a great luxurious chair, and seemed to be leaning back in a comfortable posture.

"Poor papa! He is asleep—he little knows," thought Ethel, with a sob.

"Takin' a snooze," said one of the men to the other. "Sorry we have to break his little nap."

"Papa!" cried the daughter, going up to him and gently touching him on the shoulder.

He did not stir. He would not have stirred if the Tsar of all the Russias had been waiting to give him audience.

"Papa!" cried Ethel, grasping his arm.

"It isn't any use, miss. He's gone where there can't be no writs served. Look here." And the man pointed to a dark spot on the carpet, and a tiny crimson stream that stained the dead man's clothes.

The pistol had dropped from his cold hand, and on the desk near lay a sheet of paper on which he had commenced to write:

"My Dear Wife and Child,—*I am a coward, I cannot face ruin. I have been a victim to a mad speculation. Forgive me, if you can. Have Gordon freed. I am the criminal—my key opened the safe. I dreamt I could stave off the end, but it is in vain. May God forgive me for letting him suffer. Tell Frank I honour him now for his obstinacy. My Ethel, he will make you a good husband, for he is firm, not weak and unsteady, like your poor father. My darlings, do not revile my memory—do not——* "

Here the pen had fallen. Here the overcharged heart had overcome all control—and the end arrived.

And soon, like a flash of lightning, the news went forth. The jurors, like a set of glad schoolboys, thronged about their obstinate companion.

"If I'm ever up on any charge, may my jury be made up of men like you!" cried one.

"Allow me to send you a dozen bottles of the Life Prolonger," exclaimed Sawyer; "for I'm sure you'll see its merits, and stand up for it according to your convictions."

Frank Barton laughed, and left them as soon as possible. He longed to be with the poor girl whom he knew must be overwhelmed with grief.

John Gordon, in the meantime, was taken in a sort of triumphal procession to his home. Aunt Zeph did her best with a feast that night, but it was scarcely appreciated. The joy was as bad for their appetites as pain.

* * * * * *

When Frank Barton clasped his beloved to his heart once more, he told her of another home to which he could take her at once.

"Oh, Frank, it would be too soon after—— " and the girl's voice was choked with sobs. "And there is mamma."

"Mamma will come too," he whispered. "You must yield, for, you know, I am 'an obstinate man.'"

Helen W. Pierson.

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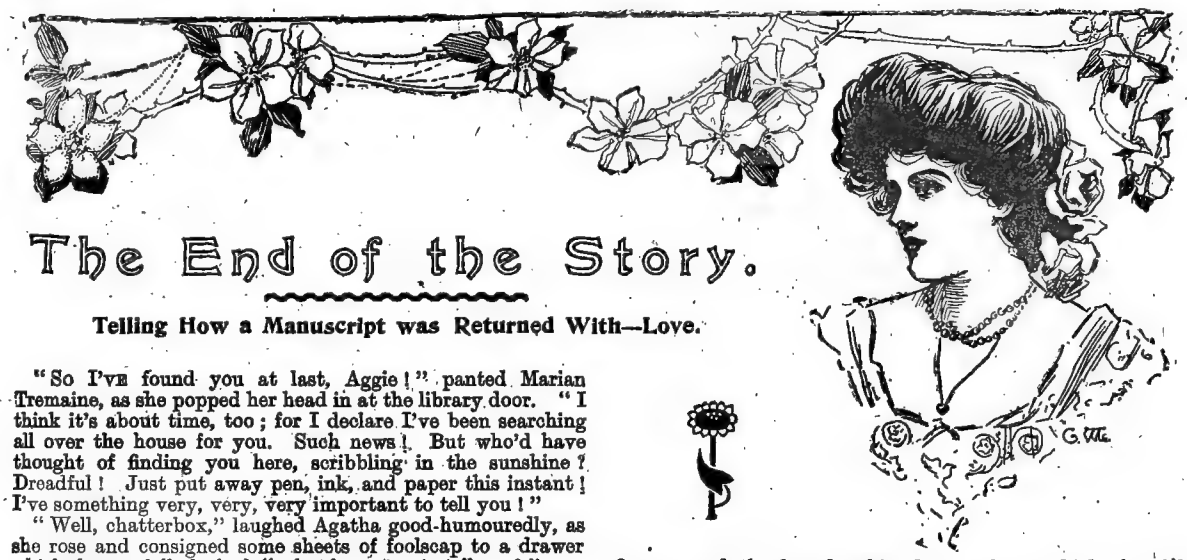

The End of the Story.

Telling How a Manuscript was Returned With—Love.

"So I've found you at last, Aggie!" panted Marian Tremaine, as she popped her head in at the library door. "I think it's about time, too; for I declare I've been searching all over the house for you. Such news! But who'd have thought of finding you here, scribbling in the sunshine? Dreadful! Just put away pen, ink, and paper this instant! I've something very, very, very important to tell you!"

"Well, chatterbox," laughed Agatha good-humouredly, as she rose and consigned some sheets of foolscap to a drawer which she carefully locked, "what have you to tell me?"

"Guess who is coming here to-day."

"An utter impossibility! I am the worst guesser in the world."

"Ah, you've got that old tale of yours running in your head, Now, confess! Aren't you thinking more about that just now than of what I am saying?"

"I really believe I am, dear," confessed the elder sister honestly, amused by Marian's acumen. "You see I was so enraptured with my heroine that I commenced writing my story before I had thoroughly thought out the plot, or even developed a hero; therefore I cannot prevent my unruly thoughts running on my work, although it is in the drawer, and out of sight. But, still, I'll try and forget it for the time being, dear, and be particularly attentive. What is your news?"

"Do you remember the name of Horace Rumsey?"

"No," after a few moments' thought; "I do not."

"Sure?"

"Nearly so. Whom does it belong to?"

"Why, you ridiculous old quill-driver!" tittered the other, "don't you remember that papa referred last Sunday afternoon to a young editor—a friend of his—of that name, whom he had, when last up in London, prevailed upon to spend his holidays here with us at Hazeldean?"

"I fancy I have some slight recollection of papa's remark," answered Agatha, with more interest than she had previously evinced; "but what of him?"

"He has just sent a telegram to say that he will be at Mortley Station at three to-day, so papa is going to drive over and bring him back. If you want to be a presentable young lady genius, you had better go upstairs to change your dress, and wash those nasty, inky fingers of yours in time for lunch."

"I will go at once. I shall not have too much time."

"Do."

Agatha was about to quit the library when her sister added:

"And, I say, Aggie——"

"Well?" said the elder girl, stopping short in the doorway.

"Don't forget to 'set your eye in a fine frenzy rolling,'" responded Marian with a mischievous laugh, which the elder sister echoed as she hurried upstairs.

The Agatha Tremaine who greeted Horace Rumsey, the young editor of the famous magazine with a popular title, and holding out a tiny hand, in a few well-chosen words, bade him welcome to Hazeldean, was, to outward appearances, a far different personage from her whom Marian had discovered earlier in the day, "scribbling in the sunshine."

There was not one spot of ink now upon those long, tapering fingers, and the broad, white brow, above which the rich brown tresses clustered in a crown befitting so queenly a woman, was no longer contracted in the pensiveness of thought. The smile which wreathed the bud-like mouth lent its sunshine to the entire expressive countenance, lighting up every feature with a quiet glory, as an aureole does the face of a pictured saint.

Horace, as he pressed the tips of her extended fingers between his own, and, bowing low, murmured a few words of thanks in reply to her cordial greeting, thought that he had never before, during his chequered career, encountered one so beautiful. Even the loveliness of the heroines of his imagination (for he had written romances) paled and faded away into nothingness as his eyes wandered to the pure face of this fair young English lady.

Agatha had just passed her twentieth year, and looked neither more nor less. Her figure was symmetrically perfect, her features were regular and exquisitely cut by Nature's master hand; she was, in brief, a woman whose charms of form and feature alone won the admiration of all who met her.

When we add that, besides her outward graces, Miss Tremaine possessed a highly-cultured mind, and the genius of rare and priceless abilities, it may be readily conceived how great an interest a thoughtful student of life like Horace Rumsey took in the discourse of his new acquaintance.

He thought her beautiful, accomplished, fairest of all women he had ever met, and his eyes expressed even more homage than his tongue paid her.

Colonel Tremaine, from his seat at the head of the table, narrowly watched his young visitor's face, and read therein how much the editor was fascinated by Agatha's beauty.

The old gentleman was very partial to Horace, although he saw him but seldom; and for some years had watched with much interest his career in the world of letters, in which his brilliant intellectual qualities had won him an exalted position.

Agatha's father would not, perhaps, have been sorry to see his darling allied to the young editor, whose tastes were so much in sympathy with her own.

"I wonder," thought Colonel Tremaine, as with an amused smile he overheard scraps of an earnest conversation between the two young people on a literary topic, which seemed so all-absorbing to them that surroundings were forgotten in their enthusiasm, "whether this first meeting will lead to anything further? Aggie is heart-whole, and very possibly young Rumsey's heart is in the same condition; for, busy men such as he have but little time for love-making, except when they take a holiday, like his present one. What if they both go falling in love, and eventually make a match of it?"

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"Ah, if they should! Stranger things have happened; haven't they, dear Colonel Tremaine?"

Marion eagerly questioned Agatha when they retired together that night.

"Well, how do you like him, Aggie? Does he realise your conception of an editor who decides the destinies of thousands of manuscripts?"

"He is," replied Agatha, delivering her decision with something of the gravity of a judge summing-up on a very important case, "the most gentlemanly and well-informed person I have yet had the pleasure of conversing with.

"He has evidently read much and studied more. Men and manners have long been subjected to his careful analysis, and his touches of description are so happy that he succeeds in placing before you in a few words a finished picture of persons he has met, whom you instantly seem to recognise and welcome by virtue of their striking likeness to others whom we rub shoulders with every day. He is truly an artist in speech, has a bright and happy fancy, is full of a sparkling humour; and yet is also a great and grand thinker. I am sure he must be a noble and good man, for I do not believe that one with a bad heart could talk in the exalted strain which he employs."

"Why, Aggie," cried Marian, who had listened in amazement; "how enthusiastically you speak, and how flushed your face is! Surely you are yourself infected with a little of our friend's grandeur of thought! Why don't you make him the prototype of some character in that story of yours?"

The half-bantering words struck on Agatha's ears like an inspiration.

"I will," she exclaimed with sparkling eyes, "Horace Rumsey shall be my hero!"

The succeeding week was a very busy one with Agatha Tremaine. She worked diligently at her story, and, true to her sudden resolution, word-painted a most faithful portrait of Horace in the fiction she was weaving, unconsciously investing the ideal with those splendid qualities which she daily discovered in the fine original. She felt strangely infatuated with her hero; and somehow he never seemed to her to be so perfect on paper as he was in reality; the feeling haunted her that she had left out of the picture some grand, distinguishing trait of the pictured.

Strangely enough all this time the girl shunned the presence of the real Horace instinctively. Some newly-awakened feeling within her made her grow cold and distant towards the young editor; some passion—was it intense liking or intense aversion?—but, whatever it was, one which no other man before had ever kindled in her breast, now dominated her.

She feared to meet the glance of his frank, searching eyes now; while the *tête-à-tête* conversation which had proved so delightful on the first day of their meeting seemed a terrible ordeal, to go through which again she would need Amazonian strength of will.

The library being a place much favoured by Horace Rumsey, who with almost boyish delight explored the forest of volumes of which Hazeldean boasted, revelling in their treasures of thought—some familiar to him, others seen for the first time, Agatha sought Linley Wood (about half a mile distant from Hazeldean), where, in the solitude of the summer mornings, she scribbled away at her story. The sheets of foolscap she filled assumed abnormal dimensions, and the story rapidly neared completion.

It was very delightful to sit here on a camp-stool beneath the green-garbed monarchs of the wood, whose topmost branches intertwined and made a delicious canopy overhead, shielding from the glare of the warrior sun, whose fiery shield threw glorious rays all around her as she wrote. The hum of the drowsy bees, the low ripple of little woodland rills, unceasingly flowing onward, the songs, varied as the emotions of man, of the birds in the trees around, all conduced to a dreamy languor and ecstatic sense of peace and quiet, greatly in keeping with the girl's thoughtful, poetic nature.

Agatha loved this wood—she loved its very solitude; for here her thoughts had free vent, they ebbed and flowed with the spontaneity of the rills' ripplings, the birds' song.

And all the time she wrote her hero's face was before her; the earnest, dark-grey eyes, the black, curly hair heaped in becoming untidiness on a head that might have surmounted the form of a hero of old, the finely-cut, pale features, the genius that shone out of the eyes and through that noble face, these were ever—ever before her now.

Sometimes she would lay her work down to wonder why Horace Rumsey's face so haunted her; why he, above all other men she had met, should have mastered, unknown even to herself, her thoughts.

Once, while pursuing this train of reflection, the thought came into her mind:

"Ah, well, he will be going soon."

Why was it, then, that a sudden pang shot through her heart, as though the thought had been a serpent, and had stung her? It was unaccountable—this feeling she had never felt before—this interest in one who a week ago was a stranger to her.

And yet, constantly as she thought of him, whenever she met Horace now she treated him as austerely and coldly as if he had done her an injury rather than unconsciously sat as the hero in her story.

At last the tale was all but finished. It was rather long, having already, in its rough state, filled some eighty pages of foolscap, and Agatha decided that one more morning in the wood would suffice to end it.

Several things, however, prevented this consummation for a few days.

An aunt and two girl cousins of hers came to visit the Tremaines, and Agatha had to devote her scribbling-time to them, until somebody else (in the shape of Horace Rumsey, whom our heroine thought unnecessarily attentive to Edith, the elder of her cousins), very obligingly took the responsibility off her hands.

It was very strange, but Agatha, when once more she resumed her seat on the little camp stool, and produced her writing materials, couldn't, for the life of her, proceed with that story.

She got wondering where Mr. Rumsey and Edith went, and what they did when they made excursions through the surrounding country together; not that that was anything to her—of course not, but she *did* somehow feel the want of the homage the young editor had formerly paid her, and which she fancied had strangely decreased since the arrival of Aunt Thrale and Agatha's cousins at Hazeldean.

Was it the pathos of the story she was longing to continue and could not, or the wind (there was a brisk wind running through the wood just then) that made a tear drop from her eyes and fall on the sheet of paper on her lap?

She looked down; the pearly drop lay right over the scribbled word "Horace!"

"You hateful thing!" she cried, all her wrath outpouring then, as she threw the paper from her on to the heap of manuscripts lying beside her. "I will write no more! I wish I had never started to write you! I wish I had never given you a hero! I wish I had never—never—never seen——"

She broke off abruptly, started to her feet, and rushed from the spot as if to get out of sight of the result of her labours. All the pride of her nature was up in arms to combat some unknown power that swayed her; her eyes were full of tears, her will entirely vanquished for the time being by the weight of some wondrous feeling of sad pain.

Why was it that her eyes were so dim and her heart was pulsating so wildly? Was it because Horace Rumsey was attentive to her cousin and not to her?

"What was he to her?" Agatha asked herself, "that she should weep because of his coldness—that her heart-throbs should attest how keenly she felt the loss of his homage? Nothing!" she decided after a long period of introspection, and she honestly believed it then.

She dried her tears, and had proceeded some distance in a homeward direction, when she bethought herself of her neglected, discarded story.

"What a shame!" she cried, stopping, and feeling very mean for giving way to that sudden outburst of passion. "How wrong of me to treat my poor tale so harshly! I'll

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go back and collect the scattered sheets, and to-morrow shall see finished that which my stupidity caused me to leave untouched to-day."

With that she retraced her steps. She knew every inch of the way through the wood thoroughly. She had rambled through it in the days of her childhood, and it had been a favourite haunt of hers ever since.

She soon found the spot where she had been sitting; but, alas! camp-stool and manuscript had all vanished as effectually as if the fairies of the wood had commanded their disappearance.

With the exception of Agatha, who was unusually quiet, even for her, the party assembled in the drawing-room of Hazeldean that evening was a very merry one.

Horace Rumsey seemed to be in excellent spirits. He told them quaint stories of editordom, of the queer letters he got from some of his would-be contributors, and of the young lady who sent him stories written on both sides of the paper, and across as well, provoking much laughter by the humour of his recitals.

Ever and anon he would look furtively in Agatha's direction; but she, with her eyes fixed moodily on the fire, avoided his gaze.

At length, however, he awoke her interest.

"I think the strangest event of all in my eventful career," said the editor, "occurred to-day. I suppose you don't any of you happen to be the possessor of a camp-stool and a fountain-pen."

Agatha's face grew flushed as the sky beneath an autumn sunset, and her head bent lower into the shadow as she heard. Horace continued:

"You see I was botanising in Linley Wood, where I chanced to stumble upon these articles. I also found some manuscript sheets of an unfinished tale on the sward. Thinking somebody less honest than I might come along and appropriate the tale and the other things before their owner returned, and being in a hurry to get back myself, I brought them all here, and if the owner is to be found I will most gladly return them. Being interested in things literary, my curiosity impelled me to take the liberty of reading it.

"I did not consider that I was violating any code of honour in so doing, a tale being very different from a letter or any manuscript of a private character. It is, I think, one of the most charming love-stories I have ever perused, being natural and fresh in its style—so different from the many shallow, tinselled, evanescent fictions which flood the literary market of to-day.

"It is written in a lady's hand, and the authoress, I am convinced, drew her characters from life. The earlier part of the work is the weakest, for therein the writer is apparently painting her love-scenes and the emotions of her heroine with difficulty; but later on in the tale she seems to gain power, and—even as though she had rested from her labours for a while, and in the interim fallen in love herself—to define her own emotions unwittingly, investing the love episodes with more lovely touches than any other part of the work."

"What is the matter, dear?" asked Marian, who sat beside Agatha, and heard her sigh deeply at this juncture.

"Nothing; I was only thinking."

"Strange to say," resumed the young editor, "I recognise the originals of the two principal characters in the story. The heroine, Miss Tremaine," turning to Agatha, and noting with surprise her heightened colour and excited look, "is, differing only in a few minor particulars, a very fair picture of yourself; the hero, were he but shorn of his superfluity of virtues, would be my unworthy self—in fact, my Christian name and that of the hero are identical. Now, I wonder——"

He paused, amazed, as Agatha, with a sharp cry, as though stricken with some sudden pain, rose, and hastily quitted the room.

The next morning when Horace Rumsey encountered Agatha Tremaine, the young man said:

"Pardon my boldness, Miss Tremaine, but your behaviour last night raised suspicions in my breast which your reply will dispel or confirm. Is this manuscript"—holding out a neatly-wrappered package, "your property, and also this pen?"

Agatha, with the one word "Yes," took the proffered articles from his hands.

"I fancied they were," said Horace. "And now, Miss Tremaine, I have one more duty to do, which is to—to bid you good-bye and to thank you for"—her face was averted from his gaze, for she would not let him see that her eyes were full of tears—"to thank you for your kindness—your great kindness to me during my holiday, which has been, without exception, the happiest I have ever passed during all my life."

She did not take his outstretched hand; she did not look into his earnest eyes. Her face was turned aside still, and she was conscious of a pain at her heart that was crushing—awful in its intensity. Never had she realised till then that to lose this one man's face from Hazeldean now meant losing the very light and sun of her existence. She felt she would fain have bade him stay—she knew not why, except that his compliance would make her inexpressibly happy, but she dared not put into words that which was in her thoughts.

Instead she attempted to answer him.

"I am glad to hear you were so comfortable, Mr. Rumsey," she faltered. "Good——"

But she got no further. Fresh tears gushed from her eyes, grief choked her utterance; and it was when she found herself in Horace Rumsey's arms, her flushed, tear-bedewed cheek drawn close to his broad, strong breast, and his lips many times pressing hers, that she read aright the secret which had been locked in her soul, and which she had never before understood. She loved him!

And he (who had loved *her* from the first day they met) had not dared to breathe a syllable of his passion to the woman he had deemed haughty, cold, and a stranger to any kinder feeling for him. Now, however, he learnt from her own sweet, shy lips that his wildest dreams were realised; that she did really and truly love her hero as fondly as ever woman loved man before.

"We have much to thank that story of yours for, darling," Horace said later, as, after having seen Colonel Tremaine, and formally solicited his eldest daughter's hand (with a very favourable result, if one might presume to judge by the young editor's proud, triumphant expression), the lovers sat together in the garden discussing their future; "for it was from that that I first learnt that Horace Rumsey was not altogether a nobody in your eyes. It is a charming tale, as I before said, but it is still incomplete. How will you finish it? Shall your hero and heroine (who so resemble us) end their imaginary courtship as we shall ours—in reality?"

"How shall we end ours, Horace?" asked Agatha archly.

"In matrimony, my darling!"

Two love stories—the real and the ideal—ended in that way.

John Adbury.

Edith: "If Jack Barlow were to propose to me I wouldn't know whether to say yes or no." Maud: "Well, don't worry, dear, I accepted him last night."

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THE FRESH AIR FUND.

What it Is, Why it was Started. What it has Done. What it will Do.

For grown up men and women great poverty is a misfortune, but for little children it is a tragedy, a sin against civilisation. They live in an atmosphere necessarily vicious. From the bright things of the world that stimulate great ideals they are barred.

There are no primrose springs, no wild rose summers, no autumns amongst the shocks of corn for the little prisoners in the slums.

If you had seen these little people on a torrid August day when the brick and stone are baking, and the foul air of the alley lies like a fog undisturbed by a breeze; if you had seen them on such a day nursing a withered flower, or feebly playing with old tins and bits of wood in the dried mud of the gutter, you would feel a sudden pity pulling at your heart strings.

The Fresh Air Fund is an organisation which has been founded to take these little prisoners of the towns out into the clean, wholesome countryside for at least one day in the year. It has been described as the cheapest charity, and this it certainly is for two reasons:—

1. The F.A.F. devotes the whole of the moneys subscribed to the purpose for which their donors intend them. There are no deductions for rent or salaries or postage, or the thousand and one expenses which make so big a hole in many other excellent charities. The whole of the expenses are paid by Messrs. C. Arthur Pearson Ltd., and by the Ragged School Union, which places its great organisation at the disposal of the Fund.

2. There is no charity in the case of which so little buys so much. Ninepence pays for a day's delight for a child. Eight pounds two shillings provides all that is necessary for the enjoyment of a complete party of two hundred children, with the needful complement of attendants.

As a broad rule, threepence pays for a child's fare, and sixpence more buys it enough food for two good meals.

Every penny subscribed is spent on those two wonder-workers—food and fares.

There are no distinctions of creed. Need and the improbability of any other holiday are the only qualifications.

The excursion parties of the F.A.F. consist for the most part of from 600 to 1,000 children, and three adults are allowed to every 100 of the little ones. This brings the total cost of the party of 600 up to £24 6s., but if anyone forwards a cheque for £8 2s., this being a sufficient sum to pay for 200 children, the day is known by any name the donor cares to select.

The F.A.F. may be judged by its works. During the past twelve years it has given one million and fifty thousand poor children a day amongst the woods and valleys, and the seaside. That is indeed an undertaking to be proud of.

It was started in *Pearson's Weekly*, and is now assisted by other publications issued from the same offices, and by the Daily Express, St. James's Gazette, Birmingham Gazette, and the North Mail.

With the aid of the practical advice of Mr. John Kirk, Secretary of the Ragged School Union, and the assistance of his Council, it succeeded the first year in giving a day's outing to 24,000 London children.

This wasn't half a bad start, and after one year more of work in London it was found possible to extend the scheme of operations to other large towns. First, 5,000 children were given a day in Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow, and Birmingham, and then the scheme was extended, until it now includes the thirty-three biggest towns in the kingdom, and the two large districts known as the Rhondda and the Potteries. The towns are:

Aberdeen, Belfast, Blackburn, Birmingham, Bristol, Bradford, Bolton, Cardiff, Dublin, Derby, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Gateshead, Hull, Halifax, London, Leeds, Liverpool, Leicester, Manchester, Nottingham, Newcastle, Norwich, Oldham, Portsmouth, Preston, Plymouth, Sheffield, Sunderland, Southampton, Swansea, Wolverhampton.

In each of these places the excursions are arranged and looked after by a local committee of well-known ladies and gentlemen formed for that purpose.

Such has been the work of the F.A.F. in the past. As to the future it is in your hands. It is not a conspicuous charity; there are no great buildings to advertise what it is about. But all the same there is no more worthy charity in Great Britain. Quietly and steadily it does its work in the slums of the great cities.

There is no long list of expenses, no highly paid secretaries and organisers, no drain for printing and correspondence. Every penny subscribed goes to the children in food and fares; every penny not thus expended is supplied by the promoters, Messrs. C. Arthur Pearson Ltd. and the Ragged School Union.

Subscriptions should be sent to the Hon. Sec., F.A.F., Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., and will be acknowledged in *Pearson's Weekly* as soon as possible.

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Unsolved Love Problems.

No. XII.—THE TEST OF RUTH LAWSON.

A prize of One Guinea is offered to the reader who sends in the most Satisfactory Solution to the Problem. Replies should not exceed one hundred words. See "Your Editor Chats."

Mr. Samuel Lawson, contractor and millionaire, but generally called "Old Sam," sat in his sparsely furnished office. He had finished his day's work, but the frown on his heavy but not unpleasing face showed that his mind was still occupied by some knotty problem.

"It worries me more than business that would bring me in a cool thousand," he muttered as he passed his hand over his brow and gave vent to a noisy sigh, "by Jingo, I'll have it out with him at once."

Even as he spoke a tall, slight, young man entered the room. He was strikingly handsome, with aquiline features, and a somewhat haughty carriage, which was modified directly he spoke by a natural courtesy that showed itself in his every word and action. He held a bundle of papers in his hand, and said:

"About this Nigeria business, what do you wish me to reply?"

"Oh, to-morrow will do for that," said Old Sam. "Knock off work now—I want to speak to you on a private matter."

The secretary seated himself, and awaited the old man's next words. After a silence he spoke.

"We've done pretty well this year, eh?"

"Very well!" he replied in some surprise.

"Touched the million again, eh?"

"Just passed it, Mr. Lawson."

The contractor chuckled, and again lapsed into silence. Cecil Lane-Fox awaited the outcome of this unusual beginning with some interest. Work had hitherto been the only subject on which they had conferred. What could he be going to say?

"And my little girl will get it all. Not so bad for one girl, eh?"

Cecil answered in a matter-of-fact tone:

"She will be quite one of the richest heiresses in England."

The old man shot a penetrating glance at him from small eyes that were unexpectedly keen.

"It will be a lucky man who gets her."

Cecil assented, but was genuinely astonished when the speaker turned on him and asked suddenly:

"What do *you* think of her?"

A vision of Ruth Lawson, sallow, silent, insignificant, and dressed in execrable taste, rose before him, but he showed no sign of embarrassment as he replied:

"I think Miss Lawson is a young lady who thoroughly deserves her good fortune."

"That she does!" cried her father emphatically. "A better girl than my Ruth never stepped—not so handsome, perhaps, as her mother, but one as pays for dressing."

Cecil repressed a shudder at the "dressing" as understood by Old Sam, and with a vivid remembrance of the florid portrait of an unmistakably Jewish lady that had been proudly pointed out to him in the contractor's ornate dining-room as "My late wife," thanked Heaven that he was not called upon to express an opinion upon *her* good looks.

His employer spoke again:

"Look here, Mr. Lane-Fox, beating about the bush don't suit me, what I have to say is this—you are poor—you needn't look so 'aughty,' you must be terribly poor before you'd 'a' consented to come and work under me—you are poor, but you've got good looks and a duke for your uncle. My girl is rich—rich enough to buy up your uncle, and she favours you (not that she says so, mind you, but I love her and I know. Now, what do you say to marrying her, my boy?"

Cecil was thoroughly astonished. The few times he had been to the contractor's house, he had hardly noticed his young hostess, though he had always treated her with the kindness and courtesy due to a woman, and he had not the faintest idea that she regarded him as more than part of the furniture of her father's office. His first impulse was to reply:

"Thank Heaven, I'm not so poor as that!"

But he restrained himself.

That very morning he had received a most unhappy letter from his mother. On his father's death they had discovered that the solicitor to whom the care of the estate had been confided had made away with all their money. It was then that, finding themselves almost penniless, Cecil had put his shoulder to the wheel, and endeavoured to make enough to keep his mother and younger brother till they could sell their estate and readjust their lives. Now he learnt that the money that should have gone to pay off an old mortgage had also stopped short at the solicitor's pocket, and the mortgagee was about to foreclose. It flashed on him what Ruth Lawson's money would mean—the mortgage paid off, the property improved, his mother comfortable and happy for her life, his promising young brother sent to Harrow, and he himself restored to his proper place in time to contest the seat at the next general election.

Mr. Lawson continued:

"Turn it over in your mind. It's an offer most young men would jump at, but it's an offer I wouldn't make to everyone. I like you, you're the real sort, and my Ruth likes you, and by Jove, I've bought her everything she set her heart on since she was a baby—so high—and I'm not going to let her get paler and thinner, eating her heart out, for want of a little plain speaking."

Cecil was still silent—could he do it? The advantages to everyone were plain, the disadvantages would only affect himself. Besides, why shouldn't he love her? He knew nothing of her, under her plain exterior she might possess noble qualities of heart and mind, at least she had never said anything that jarred on him, and as to her dress—well, she dressed at present to please her father, perhaps in future she would do it to please him, and anyhow, with a good dressmaker one could not go far wrong. Heaps of men married for money with far less provocation, why should not he? He would accept the old man's offer, determined that if it were possible that he would find reason to love the girl, but if that were not possible to treat her with every tenderness and attention, never ceasing to be grateful for what she had done for him. His was not the nature that could alone find

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happiness in love; ambition stood for much to him. The old man's tone, the terms he had used, all grated on him, but he had schooled himself to that long ago, and had ceased to let his employer's views or ways of expressing himself have any effect on his own mind or temper. Cecil was a man of character admirably suited to the career he had planned for himself years ago, namely, politics. Therefore he at last replied with dignity:

"I thank you for your very kind and flattering offer, and I shall be pleased to call on Miss Lawson to learn whether she is willing to accept me as a husband."

Old Sam heaved a sigh of relief. He had intended to impress upon the penniless young man the great advantages that would accrue to him by this marriage, but he found instead he was only delighted that Cecil had accepted.

"Thank you!" he cried fervently, wringing his hand. "Come to dinner to-morrow night, and fix it up with my girl afterwards."

Cecil accepted the invitation rather stiffly.

That evening Ruth was surprised at her father's jovial mood, but still more astonished was she at what he said to her in the library (so-called) after dinner.

"Ruth, my girl, would you like to get married?"

Ruth's pale face flushed all over as she replied shrinking: "Oh, no, father, why should I?"

He looked at her for a moment, and then laughed.

"Now, I warrant you think I'm going to propose young Moss, or Dan Lewison—proper enough young men, too—but not your sort, eh?"

He seemed almost to be enjoying her confusion.

"What would you say, now, to that young aristocrat, Cecil Lane-Fox?" His tone was triumphant.

"Mr. Lane-Fox?" she stammered, going as pale as she had before been red. "Did he—did he——"

"No, he didn't exactly," replied her father. "I saw how it was with you, and I've never yet seen you want anything that I didn't try to get for you, so I just suggested, you know, and he is coming to-morrow evening to ask you himself."

"Oh, father," she murmured, white to the lips, "did he say that he loved me?"

"I can't say that he did," replied her father ruefully, "but then I didn't think to ask him. I put it to him as a business proposition, and he accepted."

Now Ruth appeared in a new light, with her eyes blazing: she said bitterly:

"You bought him as you would have bought me a diamond necklace, I suppose."

"Why, Ruth, girl!" cried her father, looking at her in astonishment. "What's come over you? I thought you'd be so pleased and happy."

In Ruth's gentle nature, resentment had no fast hold. Whatever her father had done, it was from love for her, so, kissing him, she said:

"You are a dear, kind father, and no one will ever love me as you do," and then she fled from the room.

Poor Ruth probed her wound to its depth.

"Have I worn my heart on my sleeve so openly?" And then as she remembered the many evenings when she had (so adroitly, as she thought) led the conversation to the subject of the young secretary, she confessed to herself that she ought to have known that her father, who owed his success to his ability to guess what people were trying to conceal, would soon penetrate that secret she had thought so safely hidden at the bottom of her heart.

Never for one moment did she imagine that Cecil loved her. Did she blame him that he was willing to sell himself? No, "the king could do no wrong." She knew he would bring to the marriage more than enough to equalise her one advantage of money.

Would he through her deep and tender love learn to love her also? Or would the strain become intolerable?

Should she aim at this dazzling happiness knowing that if she failed it would be the direst misery?

What answer should she give him on the morrow?

L. Hughes.

A Golden Guinea Offered.

Would you like to win a guinea in a most simple way? No doubt you would, and you have your opportunity to do so now.

This is the way by which you can try to make yourself one guinea the richer. On the previous page appears a story, entitled "The Test of Ruth Lawson." Read the story, and you will find that at its conclusion the lady in the piece is confronted with a problem which she finds very difficult to solve.

Imagine yourself in her shoes. What would *you* do? What course do you think Ruth Lawson should decide upon?

I offer a prize of one guinea to the reader who sends me what I consider to be the most sensible advice to her under the circumstances.

Replies must not exceed one hundred words, and should be written on one side of the paper only.

My decision as to the winner will be final. Envelopes should be addressed to "The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.," with "Twelfth Love Problem" marked in the top left-hand corner.

All replies must reach these offices by first post Friday morning, May 6th. None arriving after this time will be considered.

A Love Problem and a Parallel Case.

"E. M." writes me as follows:

"Dear Sir,—*Your Unsolved Love Problem, 'Brian Cresswell's Choice,' particularly appeals to me by reason of its being so like my own case some years ago. In my case, however, my wife was then a nurse (and not a ward) of the scoundrel who wanted to marry her, and who persuaded me to become his patient when there was nothing the matter with me, and who told me I should never get away from him alive, unless I resigned all thoughts of winning his young nurse. Other doctors have since told me that it was a wonder that both of us ever got away from him alive, for not long afterwards he was proved to be insane, and was sent to an asylum where he is likely to remain for the rest of his days.*"

I am glad to hear that "E. M." got out of his dilemma successfully, and that he and the bride he had such a difficulty to win are perfectly happy. Perhaps some of my other readers may have also found that the course of true love does not run smoothly. If so, I should be glad to hear of their experiences, for I have always a ready ear for the personal stories of my subscribers.

An Appeal for the Little Ones.

Perhaps you do not know the history of the Fresh Air Fund, of the good it is striving successfully to do, of the manner in which thousands of poor little slum-bred children are being afforded a day of heavenly bliss. If you do not, turn to page 556, and read what thereon is written. It cannot fail to interest you; it cannot fail to touch your heart.

Your Editor.

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YOU CAN START THIS SPLENDID SERIAL TO-DAY.

A Story of Love and Crime.

By ARNOLD BENNETT.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

Mr. Theodore Racksole, American multi-millionaire, arrives at the Grand Babylon Hotel, and in consequence of an altercation with Jules, the all-important head waiter, he purchases the hotel for £400,000, with the intention of dismissing Jules from the staff.

Reginald Dimmock, English companion to Prince Aribert of Posen, dines the same evening with Racksole, who suspects that there is some sort of secret understanding between the young equerry and Jules.

The millionaire that night retires to bed very late, and is greatly surprised to see the waiter emerge from a room which he believes to be occupied by his daughter Nella.

Investigating the matter, Racksole finds that Dimmock is inhabiting the rooms, he having volunteered to change apartments with Nella, as a window of those she had intended to occupy had been broken by a stone flung from the outside. The millionaire accepts the explanation, although the circumstances of the case worry him considerably.

The next morning he learns that Miss Spencer, the bureau clerk, has left the hotel during the night, without giving any warning whatsoever.

Racksole dismisses Jules the first thing in the morning, forbidding him to enter the hotel again. Prince Aribert of Posen arrives, and Nella recognises him as a gentleman she has met in Paris as "Count Steenbock."

Dimmock is seen to drop dead in the quadrangle of the hotel. The cause of death is mysterious. More mysterious still is the way in which Dimmock's dead body disappears during the night—a coincidence being that Racksole discovers Jules in the hotel precincts.

The affair is kept very quiet, and does not leak out into the newspapers.

Prince Aribert is in great grief, and tells Nella that he has been informed that his nephew, Prince Eugen, the hereditary Grand Duke of Posen, who is almost of an age with himself, has disappeared in Ostend or the neighbourhood. Aribert imagines that Eugen is the victim of a plot, and decides to return to the Continent at once.

On the morning following the Prince's departure, Miss Spencer comes to the Grand Babylon disguised as the Baroness Zerlinski. Nella, suspicious of the woman's manner, watches her, and sees her take a note out of a cream puff that is served to her at lunch.

Suddenly the identity of the Baroness as Miss Spencer strikes Nella. Discovering that she has set out for Ostend, Nella decides to follow her, and tracks her to a house in that town. Boldly confronting Miss Spencer with a revolver, she learns various important facts about the Dimmock mystery; but by a trick, Miss Spencer eventually bests Nella.

The latter faints, and, awakening, finds herself on board a yacht.

Jules, otherwise Mr. Tom Jackson, is approaching her.

The erstwhile waiter tells Nella that he has her in his power, but that he will release her if she consents to marry him.

Nella boldly refuses, and suddenly a figure springs out of a dinghy a few feet away and knocks Jules down. It is Prince Aribert!

A Mr. Sampson Levi, stockbroker, seeks an interview with Theodore Racksole at the Grand Babylon. The two men are attracted to one another, and exchange confidences. Racksole tells the stockbroker of the occurrences at the hotel, and Mr. Sampson Levi explains how he had an appointment with Prince Eugen in order to arrange the terms of a State loan. The Prince was wishing to marry Princess Anna of Eckstein-Schwartzburg, but could not do so until he had paid off his debts, amounting to one million pounds.

The disappearance of the Prince had complicated matters considerably, for the day had arrived when the money was to be paid over. If Prince Eugen did not appear he could not have the money.

Suddenly an idea strikes Racksole. Another pauper prince might be wishing to marry Princess Anna, and therefore it would be to his interests to stop the loan. Hence, perhaps, the solution to the disappearance of Prince Eugen.

That night Racksole discovers Rocco engaged in a mysterious operation in the State bathroom on—the body of Reginald Dimmock!

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THIS WEEK'S INSTALMENT.

FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.
Rocco Answers Some Questions.

Rocco turned round with the swiftness of a startled tiger, and gave Theodore Racksole one long, piercing glance.

"*You!*" said Rocco, with as pure an Anglo-Saxon accent and intonation as Racksole himself could have accomplished.

The most extraordinary thing about the situation was that at this juncture Theodore Racksole did not know what to say. He was so dumfounded by the affair, and especially by Rocco's absolute and sublime calm, that both speech and thought failed him.

"I give in," said Rocco. "From the moment you entered this hotel I was afraid of you. I told Jules I was afraid of you. I knew there would be trouble with a man of your kidney, and I was right; confound it! I tell you I give in. I know when I'm beaten. I've got no revolver and no weapon of any kind. I surrender. Do what you like."

And with that Rocco sat down on a chair. It was magnificently done. Only a truly great man could have done it. Rocco actually kept his dignity.

For answer, Racksole walked slowly into the vast apartment, seized a chair, and, dragging it up to Rocco's chair, sat down opposite to him. Thus they faced each other, their knees almost touching, both in evening dress. On Rocco's right hand was the bed, with the body of Reginald Dimmock. On Racksole's right hand, and a little behind him, was the marble washstand, still littered with Rocco's implements. The electric light shone on Rocco's left cheek, leaving the other side of his face in shadow. Racksole tapped him on the knee twice.

"So you're another Englishman masquerading as a foreigner in my hotel," Racksole remarked, by way of commencing the interrogation.

"I'm not," answered Rocco quietly. "I'm a citizen of the United States."

"The dickens you are!" Racksole exclaimed.

"Yes, I was born at West Orange, New Jersey State. I call myself an Italian because it was in Italy that I first made a name as a *chef*—at Rome. It is better for a great *chef* like me to be a foreigner. Imagine a great *chef* named Elihu P. Rucker. You can't imagine it, Mr. Racksole. I defy you to imagine it. I changed my nationality for the same reason that my friend and colleague, Jules, otherwise Mr. Jackson, changed his."

"So Jules is your friend and colleague, is he?"

"He was, but from this moment he is no longer. I began to disapprove of his methods no less than a week ago, and my disapproval will now take an active form."

"Will it?" said Racksole. "I calculate it just won't, Mr. Elihu P. Rucker, citizen of the United States. Before you are very much older you'll be in the kind hands of the police, and your activities, in no matter what direction, will come to an abrupt conclusion."

"It is possible," sighed Rocco.

"In the meantime, I'll ask you one or two questions for my own private satisfaction. You've acknowledged that the game is up, and so you may as well answer them with as much candour as you feel yourself capable of. See?"

"I see," replied Rocco calmly, "but I guess I can't answer all questions. I'll do what I can."

"Well," said Racksole, clearing his throat, "what's the scheme all about? Tell me in a word."

"Not in a thousand words. It isn't my secret, you know."

"Why was poor little Dimmock poisoned?" The millionaire's voice softened as he looked for an instant at the remains of the unfortunate young man.

"I don't know," said Rocco. "I don't mind informing you that I objected to that part of the business. I wasn't made aware of it till after it was done, and then I tell you it got my dander up considerable."

"You mean to say you don't know why Dimmock was done to death?"

"I mean to say I couldn't see the sense of it. Of course he—er—died, because he sort of cried off the scheme, having previously taken a share in it. I don't mind saying that much, because you probably guessed if for yourself. But I solemnly state that I have a conscientious objection to murder."

"Then it was murder?"

"It was a kind of murder," Rocco admitted.

"Who did it?"

"Unfair question," said Rocco.

"Who else is in this precious scheme besides Jules and yourself?"

"Don't know, on my honour."

"Well, then, tell me this. What have you been doing to Dimmock's body?"

"How long were you in that bath-room?" Rocco parried, with sublime impudence.

"Don't question me, Mr. Rucker," said Theodore Racksole. "I feel very much inclined to break your back across my knee. Therefore I advise you not to irritate me. What have you been doing to Dimmock's body?"

"I've been embalming it."

"Em—balming it."

"Certainly; Richardson's system of arterial fluid injection, as improved by myself. You weren't aware that I included the art of embalming among my accomplishments. Nevertheless, it is so."

"But why?" asked Racksole, more mystified than ever. "Why should you trouble to embalm the poor chap?"

"Can't you see? Doesn't it strike you? That body has to be taken care of. It contains, or, rather, it did contain, very serious evidence against some person or persons unknown to the police. It may be necessary to move it about from place to place. A body can't be hidden for long; it betrays itself. One couldn't throw it into the Thames, for it would have been found inside twelve hours. One couldn't bury it—it wasn't safe. The only thing was to keep it handy and movable, ready for emergencies. I needn't inform you that, without embalming, you can't keep a dead body handy and movable for more than four or five days. It's the kind of thing that won't keep. And so it was suggested that I should embalm it, and I did. Mind you, I still objected to the murder, but I couldn't go back on a colleague, you understand. You do understand that, don't you? Well, here you are, and here it is, and that's all."

Rocco leant back in his chair as though he had said everything that ought to be said. He closed his eyes to indicate that so far as he was concerned the conversation was also closed. Theodore Racksole stood up.

"I hope," said Rocco, suddenly opening his eyes, "I hope you'll call in the police without any delay. It's getting late, and I don't like going without my night's rest."

"Where do you suppose you'll get your night's rest?" Racksole asked.

"In the cells, of course. Haven't I told you I know when I'm beaten. I'm not so blind as not to be able to see that there's at any rate a *prima facie* case against me. I expect I shall get off with a year or two's imprisonment as accessory after the fact—I think that's what they call it. Anyhow, I shall be in a position to prove that I am not implicated in the murder of this unfortunate nincompoop." He pointed, with a strange, scornful gesture of his elbow, to the bed. "And now, shall we go? Everyone is asleep, but there will be a policeman within call of the watchman in the portico. I am at your service. Let us go down together, Mr. Racksole. I give you my word to go quietly."

"Stay a moment," said Theodore Racksole curtly; "there is no hurry. It won't do you any harm to forego another hour's sleep, especially as you will have no work to do to-morrow. I have one or two more questions to put to you."

"Well?" Rocco murmured, with an air of tired resignation, as if to say, "What must be must be."

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"Where has Dimmock's body been during the last three or four days, since he —died?"

"Oh!" answered Rocco, apparently surprised at the simplicity of the question. "It's been in my room, and one night it was on the roof; once it went out of the hotel as luggage, but it came back the next day as a case of Demerara sugar. I forget where else it has been, but it's been kept perfectly safe and treated with every consideration."

"And who contrived all these manœuvres?" asked Racksole as calmly as he could.

"I did. That is to say, I invented them and I saw that they were carried out. You see, the suspicions of your police obliged me to be particularly spry."

"And who carried them out?"

"Ah! that would be telling tales. But I don't mind assuring you that my accomplices were innocent accomplices. It is absurdly easy for a man like me to impose on underlings — absurdly easy."

"What did you intend to do with the body ultimately?"

Racksole pursued his inquiry with immovable countenance.

"Who knows?" said Rocco, twisting his beautiful moustache. "That would have depended on several things—on your police, for instance. But probably in the end we should have restored this mortal clay"—again he jerked his elbow—"to the man's sorrowing relatives."

"Do you know who the relatives are?"

"Certainly. Don't you? If you don't I need only hint that Dimmock had a Prince for his father."

"It seems to me," said Racksole, with cold sarcasm, "that you behaved rather clumsily in choosing this bedroom as the scene of your operations."

"Not at all," said Rocco. "There was no other apartment so suitable in the whole hotel. Who would have guessed that anything was going on here? It was the very place for me."

"I guessed," said Racksole succinctly.

"Yes, you guessed, Mr. Racksole. But I had not counted on you. You are the only smart man in the business. You are an American citizen, and I hadn't reckoned to have to deal with that class of person."

"Apparently I frightened you this afternoon?"

"Not in the least."

"You were not afraid of a search?"

With the swiftness of lightning Rocco shut the iron screen. Theodore Racksole was a prisoner!

"I knew that no search was intended. I knew that you were trying to frighten me. You must really credit me with a little sagacity and insight, Mr. Racksole. Immediately you began to talk to me in the kitchen this afternoon I felt you were on the track. But I was not frightened. I merely decided that there was no time to be lost—that I must act quickly. I did act quickly, but, it seems, not quickly enough. I grant that your rapidity exceeded mine. Let us go downstairs, I beg."

Rocco rose and moved towards the door. With an instinctive action Racksole rushed forward and seized him by the shoulder.

"No tricks!" said Racksole. "You're in my custody, and don't forget it."

Rocco turned on his employer a look of gentle, dignified scorn.

"Have I not informed you," he said, "that I have the intention of going quietly?"

Racksole felt almost ashamed for the moment. It flashed across him that a man can be great, even in crime.

"What an ineffable fool you were," said Racksole, stopping him at the threshold, "with your talents, your unique talents, to get yourself mixed up in an affair of this kind. You are ruined. And, by Jove! you were a great man in your own line."

"Mr. Racksole," said Rocco very quickly, "that is the truest word you have spoken this night. I was a great man in my own line. And I am an ineffable fool. Alas!" He brought his long arms to his sides with a thud.

"Why did you do it?"

"I was fascinated—fascinated by Jules. He, too, is a great man. We had great opportunities, here in the Grand Babylon. It was a great game. It was worth the candle. The prizes were enormous. You would admit these things yourself if you knew the facts. Perhaps some day you will know them, for you are a fairly clever person at getting to the root of a matter. Yes, I was blinded, hypnotised."

"And now you are ruined."

"Not ruined, not ruined. Afterwards, in a few years, I shall come up again. A man of genius like me is never ruined till he is dead. Genius is always forgiven. Suppose I am sent to prison. When I emerge I shall be no gaol-bird. I shall be Rocco—the great Rocco. And half the hotels in Europe will invite me to join them."

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"Let me tell you, as man to man, that you have achieved your own degradation. There is no excuse."

"I know it," said Rocco. "Let us go."

Racksole was distinctly and notably impressed by this man—by this master spirit to whom he was to have paid a salary at the rate of three thousand pounds a year. He even felt very sorry for him. And so, side by side, the captor and the captured, they passed into the vast deserted corridor of the hotel. Rocco stopped at the grating of the first lift.

"It will be locked," said Racksole. "We must use the stairs to-night."

"But I have a key. I always carry one," said Rocco, and he pulled one out of his pocket, and, unfastening the iron screen, pushed it open. Racksole smiled at his readiness and aplomb.

"After you," said Rocco, bowing in his finest manner, and Racksole stepped into the lift.

With the swiftness of lightning Rocco pushed forward the iron screen, which locked itself automatically. Theodore Racksole was hopelessly a prisoner within the lift, while Rocco stood free in the corridor.

"Good-bye, Mr. Racksole," he remarked suavely, bowing again, lower than before. "Good-bye; I hate to take a mean advantage of you in this fashion, but really you must allow that you have been very simple. You are a clever man, as I have already said, up to a certain point. It is past that point that my own cleverness comes in. Again, good-bye. After all, I shall have no rest to-night, but perhaps even that will be better than sleeping in a police cell. If you make a great noise you may wake someone and ultimately get released from this lift. But I advise you to compose yourself, and wait till morning. It will be more dignified. For the third time, good-bye."

And with that Rocco, without hastening, walked down the corridor and so out of sight.

Racksole said never a word. He was too disgusted with himself to speak. He clenched his fists, and put his teeth together, and held his breath. In the silence he could hear the dwindling sound of Rocco's footsteps on the thick carpet.

It was the greatest blow of Racksole's life.

The next morning the high-born guests of the Grand Babylon were aroused by a rumour that by some accident the millionaire proprietor of the hotel had remained all night locked up in the lift. It was also stated that Rocco had quarrelled with his new master and incontinently left the place. A duchess said that Rocco's departure would mean the ruin of the hotel, whereupon her husband advised her not to talk nonsense.

As for Racksole, he sent a message for the detective in charge of the Dimmock affair, and bravely told him the happenings of the previous night. The narration was a decided ordeal to a man of Racksole's temperament.

"A strange story!" commented Detective Marshall, and he could not avoid a smile. "The climax was unfortunate, but you have certainly got some valuable facts."

Racksole said nothing.

"I myself have a clue," added the detective. "When your message arrived I was just coming up to see you. I want you to accompany me to a certain spot not far from here. Will you come, now, at once?"

"With pleasure," said Racksole.

At that moment a page entered with a telegram. Racksole opened it and read: "Please come instantly. Nella. Hotel Wellington, Ostend."

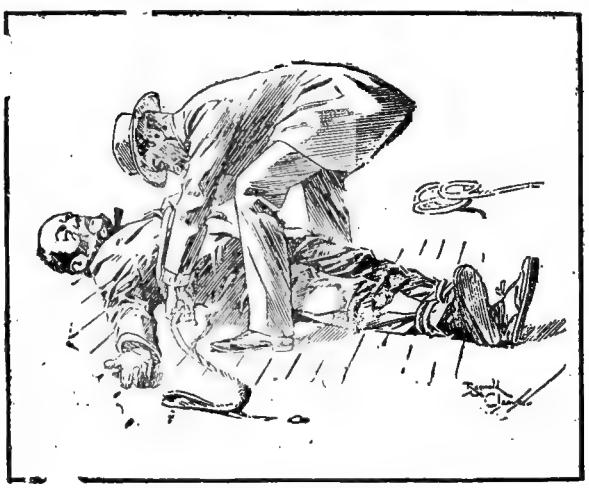
He looked at his watch.

"I can't come," he said to the detective. "I'm going to Ostend."

"But, really, Mr. Racksole," protested the detective. "My business is urgent."

"So's mine," said Racksole.

In ten minutes he was on his way to Victoria Station.



The Prince made Jules secure.

FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

End of the Yacht Adventure.

We must now return to Nella Racksole and Prince Aribert of Posen on board the yacht without a name. The Prince's first business was to make Jules, otherwise Mr. Tom Jackson, perfectly secure by means of several pieces of rope. Although Mr. Jackson had been stunned into a complete unconsciousness, and there was a contused wound under his ear, no one could say how soon he might not come to himself and get very violent. So the Prince, having tied his arms and legs, made him fast to a stanchion.

"I hope he won't die," said Nella.

"The Mr. Jacksons of this world," said Prince Aribert sententiously, "never die till they are hanged. By-the-way, I wonder how it is that no one has interfered with us. Perhaps they are discreetly afraid of my revolver—of your revolver, I mean."

Both he and Nella glanced up at the imperturbable steersman, who kept the yacht's head straight out to sea. By this time they were about two miles from the Belgian shore.

Addressing him in French, the Prince ordered the sailor to put the yacht about, and make again for Ostend Harbour. but the fellow took no notice whatever of the summons. The Prince raised the revolver, with the idea of frightening the steersman, and then the man began to talk rapidly in a mixture of French and Flemish. He said that he had received Jules' strict orders not to interfere in any way, no matter what might happen on the deck of the yacht. He was the captain of the yacht, and he had to make for a certain English port, the name of which he could not divulge; he was to keep the vessel at full steam ahead under any and all circumstances. He seemed to be a very big, a very strong, and a very determined man, and the Prince was at a loss what course of action to pursue. He asked several more questions, but the only effect of them was to render the man taciturn and ill-humoured. In vain Prince Aribert explained that Miss Nella Racksole, daughter of millionaire Racksole, had been abducted by Mr. Tom Jackson; in vain he flourished the revolver threateningly; the surly, but courageous, captain said merely that that had nothing to do with him; he had instructions, and he should carry them out. He sarcastically begged to remind his interlocutor that he was the captain of the yacht.

"It won't do to shoot him, I suppose," said the Prince to Nella. "I might bore a hole into his leg, or something of that kind."

"It's rather risky, and rather hard on the poor captain, with his extraordinary sense of duty," said Nella. "And, besides, the whole crew might turn on us. No, we must think of something else."

"I wonder where the crew is?" said the Prince.

Just then Mr. Jackson, prone and bound on the deck,

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showed signs of recovering from his swoon. His eyes opened, and he gazed vacantly around. At length he caught sight of the Prince, who approached him with the revolver well in view.

"It's you, is it?" he murmured faintly. "What are you doing on board? Who's tied me up like this?"

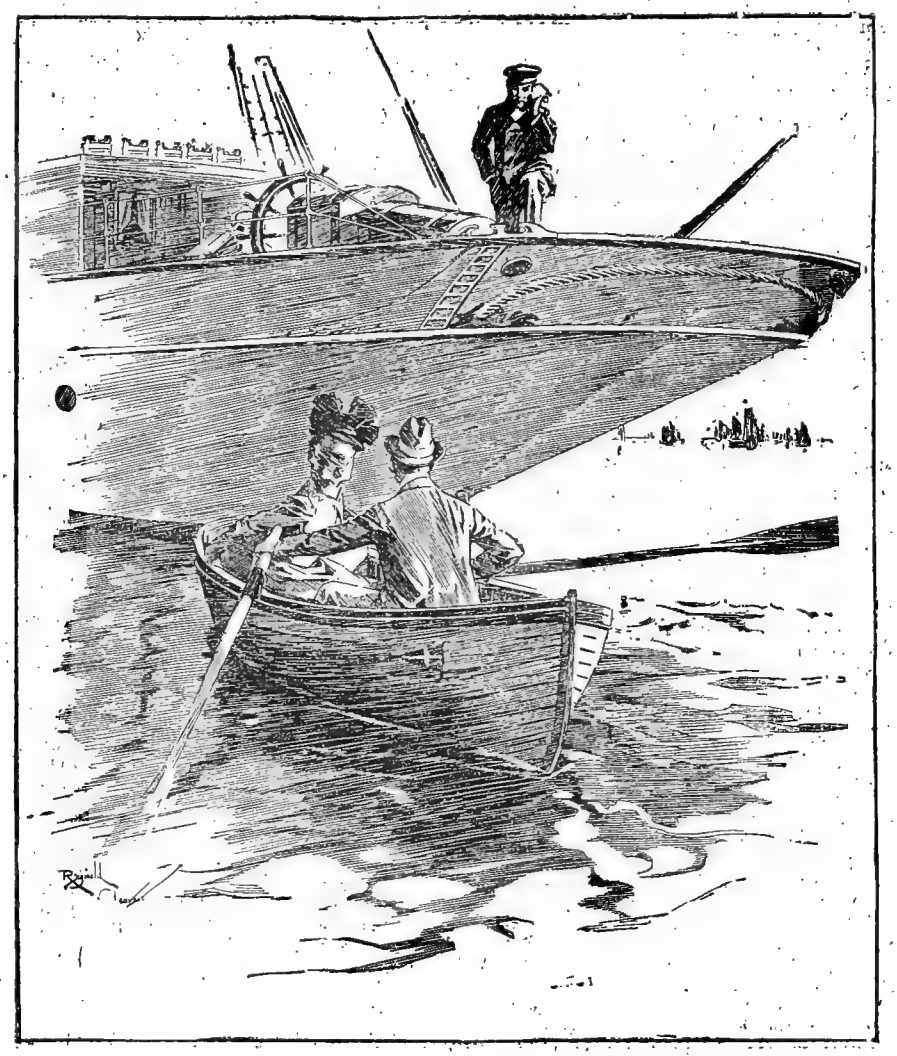
"See here!" replied the Prince, "I don't want to have any arguments, but this yacht must return to Ostend at once, where you will be given up to the authorities."

"Really!" snarled Mr. Tom Jackson. "Shall I!" Then he called out in French to the man in the wheel, "Hi, André! let these two be put off in the dinghy."

It was a peculiar situation. Certain of nothing but the possession of Nella's revolver, the Prince scarcely knew whether to carry the argument further, and with stronger measures, or to accept the situation with as much dignity as the circumstances would permit.

"Let us take the dinghy," said Nella; "we can row ashore in an hour."

He felt that she was right. To leave the yacht in such a manner seemed somewhat ignominious, and it certainly involved the escape of that profound villain, Mr. Thomas Jackson. But what else could be done? The Prince and Nella constituted one party on the vessel; they knew their own strength, but they did not know the strength of their opponents. They held the hostile ringleader bound and captive, but this man had proved himself capable of giving orders, and even to gag him would not help them if the captain of the yacht persisted in his obstinate course. Moreover, there was a distinct objection to promiscuous shooting; the Prince felt that; there was no knowing how promiscuous shooting might end.



As the dinghy receded, a figure appeared on the stern of the yacht. It was Mr. Thomas Jackson, free once more.

"We will take the dinghy," said the Prince quickly, to the captain.

A bell rang below, and a sailor and the negro boy appeared on deck. The pulsations of the screw grew less rapid. The yacht stopped. The dinghy was lowered. As the Prince and Nella prepared to descend into the little cockboat Mr. Tom Jackson addressed Nella, all bound as he lay.

"Good-bye," he said, "I shall see you again, never fear."

In another moment they were in the dinghy, and the dinghy was adrift. The yacht's screw churned the water, and the beautiful vessel slipped away from them. As it receded a figure appeared at the stern. It was Mr. Thomas Jackson. He had been released by his minions. He held a white handkerchief to his ear, and offered a calm, enigmatic smile to the two forlorn but victorious occupants of the dinghy. Jules had been defeated for once in his life; or perhaps it would be more just to say that he had been out-manœuvred. Men like Jules are incapable of being defeated. It was characteristic of his luck that now, in the very hour when he had been caught red-handed in a serious crime against society, he should be effecting a leisurely escape—an escape which left no clue behind.

The sea was utterly calm and blue in the morning sun. The dinghy rocked itself lazily in the swell of the yacht's departure. As the mist cleared away the outline of the shore became more distinct, and it appeared as if Ostend was distant scarcely a cable's length. The white dome of the great Kursaal glittered in the pale turquoise sky, and the smoke of steamers in the harbour could be plainly distinguished. In the offing was a crowd of brown-sailed fishing luggers returning with the night's catch. The many-hued bathing-vans could be counted on the distant beach. Everything seemed perfectly normal. It was difficult for either Nella or her companion to realise that anything extraordinary had happened within the last hour. Yet there was the yacht, not a mile off, to prove to them that something very extraordinary had, in fact, happened. The yacht was no

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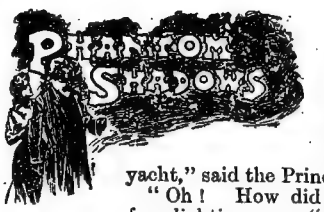

vision, nor was that sinister, watching figure at its stern a vision, either.

"I suppose Jules was too surprised and too feeble to inquire how I came to be on board his yacht," said the Prince, taking the oars.

"Oh! How did you?" asked Nella, her face lighting up. "Really, I had almost forgotten that part of the affair."

"I must begin at the beginning, and it will take some time," answered the Prince. "Had we not better postpone the recital till we get ashore?"

"I will row and you shall talk," said Nella. "I want to know now."

He smiled happily at her, but gently declined to yield up the oars.

"Is it not sufficient that I am here?" he said.

"It is sufficient, yes," she replied; "but I want to know."

With a long, easy stroke he was pulling the dinghy shorewards. She sat in the stern-sheets.

"There is no rudder," he remarked, "so you must direct me. Keep the boat's head on the lighthouse. The tide seems to be running in strongly; that will help us. The people on shore will think that we have only been for a little early morning excursion."

"Will you kindly tell me how it came about that you were able to save my life, Prince?" she said.

"Save your life, Miss Racksole? I didn't save your life; I merely knocked a man down."

"You saved my life," she repeated. "That villain would have stopped at nothing. I saw it in his eye."

"Then you were a brave woman, for you showed no fear of death." His admiring gaze rested full on her. For a moment the oars ceased to move.

She gave a gesture of impatience.

"It happened that I saw you last night in your carriage," he said. "The fact is, I had not had the audacity to go to Berlin with my story. I stopped in Ostend to see whether I could do a little detective work on my own account. It was a piece of good luck that I saw you. I followed the carriage as quickly as I could, and I just caught a glimpse of you as you entered that awful house. I knew that Jules had something to do with that house. I guessed what you were doing. I was afraid for you. Fortunately I had surveyed the house pretty thoroughly. There is an entrance to it at the back, from a narrow lane. I made my way there. I got into the yard at the back, and I stood under the window of the room where you had the interview with Miss Spencer. I heard everything that was said. It was a courageous enterprise on your part to follow Miss Spencer from the Grand Babylon to Ostend. Well, I dared not force an entrance, lest I might precipitate matters too suddenly, and involve both of us in a difficulty. I merely kept watch. Ah, Miss Racksole! you were magnificent with Miss Spencer; as I say, I could hear every word, for the window was slightly open. I felt that you needed no assistance from me. And then she cheated you with a trick, and the revolver came flying through the window. I picked it up; I thought it would probably be useful. There was a silence. I did not guess at first that you had fainted. I thought that you had escaped. When I found out the truth it was too late for me to intervene. There were two men, both desperate, besides Miss Spencer——"

"Who was the other man?" asked Nella.

"I do not know. It was dark. They drove away with you to the harbour. Again I followed. I saw them carry you on board. Before the yacht weighed anchor I managed to climb unobserved into the dinghy. I lay down full length in it, and no one suspected that I was there. I think you know the rest."

"Was the yacht all ready for sea?"

"The yacht was all ready for sea. The captain fellow was on the bridge, and steam was up."

"Then they expected me! How could that be?"

"They expected someone. I do not think they expected you."

"Did the second man go on board?"

"He helped to carry you along the gangway, but he came back again to the carriage. He was the driver."

"And no one else saw the business?"

"The quay was deserted. You see, the last steamer had arrived for the night."

There was a brief silence, and then Nella ejaculated, under her breath, "Truly, it is a wonderful world!"

And it was a wonderful world for them, though scarcely, perhaps, in the sense which Nella Racksole had intended. They had but just emerged from a highly-disconcerting experience. Among other minor inconveniences, they had had no breakfast. They were out in the sea in a tiny boat. Neither of them knew what the day might bring forth. The man, at least, had the most serious anxieties for the safety of his Royal nephew. And yet—and yet—neither of them wished that that voyage of the little boat on the summer tide should come to an end. Each, perhaps unconsciously, had a vague desire that it might last for ever, he lazily pulling, she directing his course at intervals by a movement of her distractingly pretty head. How was this condition of affairs to be explained? Well, they were both young; they both had superb health, and all the ardour of youth; and—they were together. The boat was very small indeed; her face was scarcely a yard from his. She, in his eyes, surrounded by the glamour of beauty and vast wealth; he, in her eyes, surrounded by the glamour of masculine intrepidity and the brilliance of a throne.

But all voyages come to an end, either at the shore or at the bottom of the sea, and at length the dinghy passed between the stone jetties of the harbour. The Prince rowed to the nearest steps, tied up the boat, and they landed. It was six o'clock in the morning, and a day of gorgeous sunlight had opened. Few people were about at that early hour.

"And now, what next?" said the Prince. "I must take you to a hotel."

"I am in your hands," she acquiesced, with a smile which sent the blood racing through his veins. He perceived now that she was tired and overcome, suffering from a sudden and natural reaction.

At the Hotel Wellington the Prince told the sleepy doorkeeper that they had come by the early train from Bruges, and wanted breakfast at once. It was absurdly early, but a common English sovereign will work wonders in any Belgian hotel, and in a very brief time Nella and the Prince were breakfasting on the verandah of the hotel upon chocolate that had been specially and hastily brewed for them.

"I never tasted such excellent chocolate," exclaimed the Prince.

The statement was wildly untrue, for the Hotel Wellington is not celebrated for its chocolate. Nevertheless, Nella replied enthusiastically, "Nor I." Then there was a silence, and Nella, feeling possibly that she had been too ecstatic, remarked in a very matter-of-fact tone: "I must telegraph to papa instantly."

Thus it was that Theodore Racksole received the telegram which drew him away from Detective Marshall.

SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Woman with the Red Hat.

"There is one thing, Prince, that we have just got to settle straight off," said Theodore Racksole.

They were all three seated—Racksole, his daughter, and Prince Aribert—round a dinner-table in a private room at the Hotel Wellington. Racksole had duly arrived by the afternoon boat, and had been met on the quay by the other two. They had dined early, and Racksole had heard the full story of the adventures by sea and land of Nella and the Prince. As to his own adventure of the previous night

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he said very little, merely explaining, with as little detail as possible, that Dimmock's body had come to light.

"What is that?" asked the Prince, in answer to Racksole's remark.

"We have got to settle whether we shall tell the police at once all that has occurred, or whether we shall proceed on our own responsibility. There can be no doubt as to which course we ought to pursue. Every consideration of prudence points to the advisability of taking the police into our confidence, and leaving the matter entirely in their hands."

"Oh, papa!" Nella burst out in her pouting, impulsive way. "You surely can't think of such a thing. Why, the fun has only just begun."

"Do you call last night fun?" questioned Racksole, gazing at her solemnly.

"Yes, I do," she said promptly. "Now."

"Well, I don't," was the millionaire's laconic response; but perhaps he was thinking of his own situation in the lift.

"Do you not think we might investigate a little further," said the Prince judiciously, as he cracked a walnut, "just a little further—and then, if we fail to accomplish anything, there would still be ample opportunity to consult the police?"

"How do you suggest we should begin?" asked Racksole.

"Well, there is the house which Miss Racksole so intrepidly entered last evening"—he gave her the homage of an admiring glance; "you and I, Mr. Racksole, might examine that abode in detail."

"To-night?"

"Certainly. We might do something."

"We might do too much."

"For example."

"We might shoot someone, or get ourselves mistaken for burglars. If we outstepped the law, it would be no excuse for us that we had been acting in a good cause."

"True," said the Prince. "Nevertheless——" He stopped.

"Nevertheless you have a distaste for bringing the police into the business. You want the hunt all to yourself. You are on fire with the ardour of the chase. Is not that it? Accept the advice of an older man, Prince, and sleep on this affair. I have little fancy for nocturnal escapades two nights together. As for you, Nella, off with you to bed. The Prince and I will have a yarn over such fluids as can be obtained in this hole."

"Papa," she said, "you are perfectly horrid to-night."

"Perhaps I am," he said. "Decidedly I am very cross with you for coming over here all alone. It was monstrous. If I didn't happen to be the most foolish of parents—There! Good-night. It's nine o'clock. The Prince, I am sure, will excuse you."

If Nella had not really been very tired Prince Aribert might have been the witness of a good-natured but stubborn conflict between the millionaire and his spirited offspring. As it was, Nella departed with surprising docility, and the two men were left alone.

"Now," said Racksole suddenly, changing his tone, "I fancy that after all I'm your man for a little amateur investigation to-night. And, if I must speak the exact truth, I think that to sleep on this affair would be about the very worst thing we could do. But I was anxious to keep Nella out of harm's way, at any rate till to-morrow. She is a very difficult creature to manage, Prince, and I may warn you," he laughed grimly, "that if we do succeed in doing anything to-night we shall catch it from her ladyship in the morning. Are you ready to take that risk?"

"I am," the Prince smiled. "But Miss Racksole is a young lady of quite remarkable nerve."

"She is," said Racksole drily. "I wish sometimes she had less."

"I have the highest admiration for Miss Racksole," said the Prince, and he looked Miss Racksole's father full in the face.

"You honour us, Prince," Racksole observed. "Let us come to business. Am I right in assuming that you have a reason for keeping the police out of this business, if it can possibly be done?"

"Yes," said the Prince, and his brow clouded. "I am very much afraid that my poor nephew has involved himself in some scrape that he would wish not to be divulged."

"Then you don't believe he is the victim of foul play?"

"No! Mr. Racksole, we speak in confidence—is it not so? Some years ago my foolish nephew had an affair—an affair with a feminine star of the Berlin stage. For anything I know, the lady may have been the very pattern of her sex, but where a reigning Prince is concerned scandal cannot be avoided in such a matter. I had thought that the affair was quite at an end, since my nephew's betrothal to Princess Anna is shortly to be announced. But yesterday I saw the lady to whom I have referred driving on the Digue. The coincidence of her presence here with my nephew's disappearance is too extraordinary to be disregarded."

(Another long instalment next week.)

"Come out, you villain!" Theodore Racksole cried, in low, almost vicious tones. He dragged up the cowering figure. It was his daughter Nella! This dramatic episode is described in a future instalment of "Phantom Shadows."

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Symbolical!

Molly: "What flower is that Lord Brokeleigh always wears in his buttonhole?" Dolly: "Marigold."

A Guaranteed Preventive.

Wife (finding a grey hair): "I do so hate to grow old." Husband: "You can avoid that, my dear." Wife: "How?" Husband: "Dye young."

An Awful Tragedy.

The Groom: "I can't see that cheque your father placed among the wedding presents." The Bride: "Papa is so absent-minded. He lit his cigar with it."

The Retort Gallant.

She "Why do you toy so nervously with that fan? Are you afraid of it?" He (gallantly): "I'm afraid of anything that could produce a coolness between us."

Why She Thought.

Cora: "You have a fine sense of the ridiculous." Dick (rather flattered): "Why do you think so?" Cora: "I noticed you smiling at yourself in the mirror."

It Would be Useless.

Clara (after a tiff): "I presume you would like your ring back?" George: "Never mind; keep it. No other girl I know could use that ring unless she wore it on her thumb."

Worse and Worse.

Ethel: "That detestable Mrs. Brown said that I looked thirty." Maud: "How perfectly absurd!" Ethel (elated): "Frankly, now, how old do you really think I look?" Maud: "About forty."

She Knew the Feeling.

Gracie: "See, dear, a diamond! I don't believe any other girl was ever half so happy over an engagement ring!" Madge: "Pooh, darling! I was just as foolish when Bob gave that same ring to me."

A Terrible Punishment.

Fannie: "That hideous old Mr. Jones had the impudence to propose to me." Jennie: "You refused him, of course?" Fannie: "No, I did not. Just to punish him I accepted his offer, he's worth half a million."

Business Before Pleasure.

Cissie: "Going into the drawing-room, Jack? Ethel's in there with Mr. Spooner, and you promised to have a game with me. How long will you be?" Jack: "Only until I get my sixpence to go out, Cissie!"

He Would Not be Selfish.

"It is only right that I should tell you," she said, "that father has lost all." "Not all," he exclaimed. "Yes, all," she asserted. "No," he said, firmly; "not all. You are still left to him. I could not be so cruel as to add to his misfortunes. Tell him—tell him from me that my generosity impels me to leave him what little lies in my power."

Misconstrued!

He (pleadingly): "Why can't we be married at once?" She (coyly): "Oh, I can't bear to leave father alone just now." He (earnestly): "But, my darling, he has had you such a long time." She (freezingly): "Sir!"

When the Light Went Out.

Miss Coygirl: "Jack Softleigh told me last night that I ought to accept him because he was willing to prove his love for me." Her Friend: "What did you say?" Miss Coygirl: "I said I couldn't see it in that light." Her Friend: "Then what did he say?" Miss Coygirl: "Nothing. He just turned the light out."

A Comforting Explanation.

Dashaway: "You say your sister will be down in a minute, Willie? That's good news. I thought perhaps that she wanted to be excused as she did the other day." Willie: "Not this time. I played a trick on her." Dashaway: "What did you do?" "I said you were another fellow!" exclaimed Willie, triumphantly.

She Was Alarmed.

She (gently): "I am afraid I do not love you enough to be your wife, but I shall always be your friend, and sincerely wish for your happiness." He (moodily): "I know what I'll do." She (anxiously): "You surely will not do yourself an injury?" He (calmly): "No, I will find happiness. I will marry someone else." She: "Goodness gracious! Give me another day to consider, dear."

Very Handy.

Dobson: "I tell you what, there's nothing like a bicycle for a man with a nervous, irritable disposition. My wife says I'm a much more agreeable man than I was before I got a machine." Jenkins: "Why's that—because it takes you outdoors so much?" Dobson: "Not only that, but whenever I feel like blowing somebody up, I go down and blow up my tyres, and then I feel better."

Changed His Tone.

George Hard-Up: "We shall have to be very economical this year, Mary." Mrs. H. (enthusiastically): "Yes. I intend making my own hats, bonnets, and dresses and——" George (in rapture): "Mary, you are a prize! Yes; a perfect treasure!" Mary (continuing): "And your shirts and collars and cuffs." George (in abject terror): "Mary, I wasn't really in earnest. We shall not have to be so economical as all that!"

A Born Diplomatist.

Charley was caught napping. A pair of soft, little hands covered his eyes, and a sweet voice commanded: "Guess who it is." Nothing very dreadful for Charley in this, you think; but, then, you don't know that Charley was engaged to two girls, and, for the life of him, couldn't decide which voice it was, which made it a very embarrassing position for Charley. A wrong guess would lead to complications awful to think of. But a happy thought inspired Charley, and he announced: "It's the dearest, sweetest little girl in the world." "Oh, you lovely boy!" gurgled the satisfied one, as she removed her hands. And now Charley thinks of applying for a foreign ministry, feeling that his talents would be wasted in any other than a diplomatic field.

Poor Jollyboy.

"Maria," said Mr. Jollyboy, very solemnly, thinking to take a rise out of the wife of his bosom, "I heard of a dreadful operation which was undergone by a girl. She seemed in danger of losing her sight, and the clever ophthalmic surgeon who operated on her found——" "Yes," breathlessly interposed Mrs. Jollyboy, "found what?" "That the poor girl had a young man in her eye," rejoined her hubby, with a chuckle. Silence reigned supreme for the space of five minutes, at the end of which time Mrs. Jollyboy said quietly: "Well, of course, it would all depend on what kind of young man it was, as there are many men she would have been able to see through," and with a serene smile Mrs. Jollyboy resumed her knitting, leaving the enemy completely routed

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WRONGLY JUDGED.

Relating How Margaret Ainsworth Made a Great Mistake, and the Manner in which she was Forgiven.

"AND you really mean it?"

"I certainly do."

"Well," he proceeded coolly, "you must let me tell you that I think you are making a very great mistake. Our tastes are congenial, I am rich enough for all practical purposes, and besides"—with a totally different tone of voice—"you will not be likely to find another man who loves you to the absurd degree that I do."

"Don't! We had better drop the subject, don't you think? I must go up to the hotel and meet a friend who is coming to-day."

"You are not going just now," the man asseverated decidedly. "If you are really going to refuse me, and my natural conceit makes it very difficult for me to comprehend that fact—you at least owe me the reason for the refusal. Why won't you marry me, dear?"

"Because I don't wish to do so. It seems hard for you to realise the fact that there may possibly be one woman in the world who has not succumbed to your charms."

"That is a very disagreeable tone, and I hardly believe that I am so egotistical as to merit such a vigorous snubbing." He was lounging on the beach by her side, and he suddenly turned so as to look straight into her eyes. His voice sounded harsh when he spoke again. "You have not yet given me the reason for my rejection. I don't believe that you can truthfully tell me you do not care for me at all."

"That will do. You are quite at liberty to believe whatever you wish; but I assure you that I can think of no inducement great enough to persuade me to marry you. Good morning."

"Wait." His hand was on her arm, and he looked at her with determination. "I shall keep you—forcibly if I must—but keep you I shall until you answer my question. Don't you know that I am entitled to that much, at least? Why will you not marry me?"

"Because I thoroughly despise you," she returned coldly. "Is that being explicit enough? You must pardon the rudeness as you insisted upon an answer."

"Why do you despise me?"

She looked at him disdainfully, but vouchsafed no remark. He caught her look and flushed hotly.

"You shall tell me exactly what you mean; even *you* dare not treat me so!"

"Well, you see," the woman said slowly, with a flash of unmistakable triumph in her eyes, "I know Phœbe Allison very intimately."

"Well?"

"I think that is quite sufficient for me to say. Or do you have so many such flirtations that your memory proves treacherous?"

"I have had no sort of flirtation, either with Miss Allison or with anyone else. I have been waiting all my life for one woman, who turns out to have no heart and no conscience."

"How dare you speak so to me!"

"Have I spoken as harshly to you as you have to me? Or do you imagine that I shall allow you a monopoly of that sort of thing? Do you consider it womanly to be as friendly and as lovable as you were all summer up to the last few days—to really lead me to expect a different answer from the one you have given me—and then to treat me as you are doing now?"

"Well, you see, the truth is that until last week I never imagined you to be the person you are; it was only when you spoke of being at Edgewater two seasons ago that I knew you were the man who broke Phœbe's heart and acted such a despicable part."

"Margaret, how dare you say such things? I met Miss Allison that summer, of course, but it was the merest acquaintance. After all this time don't you know me better than to bring such an accusation against me?"

"I have known Phœbe years where I have known you but months, and Phœbe"—with slow deliberation—"is quite incapable of telling me an untruth or distorting facts."

"The obvious inference being——"

"You can draw it for yourself. Why will you persist in keeping me here? It is neither gentlemanly nor courteous."

"My list of sins is already so long that a few more can hardly make any difference in your eyes. I am beginning to get some light on the subject at last, and I intend to have some more information before I release you. You can console yourself with the thought that this is the last time in all probability that I shall ever seek your society." He looked at her keenly a moment, but Margaret Ainsworth was gazing out across the ocean and refused to meet his glance. "As you seem to have been Miss Allison's confidante, suppose you tell me of what crime I stand accused."

"You did not monopolise her time, pay her every attention, make love to her, and then, after you had returned to London, write her that of course she was only having a little summer flirtation just as you were; that you understood she was not in earnest and that you had not been?"

The man looked at her with an anger in his eyes that he did not try to conceal.

"You are quite right. I did not do any of those things." Suddenly his indignation broke bounds. "I wonder how you dare to say such things to me? I certainly am fortunate

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to have escaped being accepted by you. I thank you very heartily for that. Life with a woman devoid of trust and faith would be nothing but Purgatory. One thing more and then I will not detain you longer. Give me Miss Allison's address. I intend to get to the bottom of this matter; then, when you know the truth, perhaps you will have womanliness enough to apologise for the gratuitous insults that you have given the man who said he loved you."

Margaret Ainsworth rose slowly to her feet.

"It will be an easy matter to give you Phœbe's address—much easier than you think—she is the friend I am expecting at the hotel. You did not dream of that, did you, when you indulged in your heroics?"

"You are making the list of apologies due to me very long." He sprang to his feet and stood beside her. "If Miss Allison is at the hotel we will go there now."

"Come, if you dare! Do not think she will shield you, or do you suppose that she has missed her train?"

"You are likely very soon to find out what I think, so it is hardly necessary for me to tell you."

The path was narrow, and Margaret swept on ahead of him. Duncan made no effort to keep abreast of her. They went on in silence. Suddenly there was a rush in front of them, and a slight feminine form precipitated itself into Margaret's arms.

"I simply couldn't wait any longer. I had to start out and hunt you up. Oh, Margaret, I've got such hosts to tell you! See." She held up her hand, on which gleamed an engagement-ring. "I'm ever so happy, Madge! I wonder how I ever imagined that I was in love two years ago."

Margaret threw her arm round her friend, and turned so as to face Duncan where he had halted in the path behind them.

"This is someone you know, Phœbe; an introduction will hardly be necessary, will it?"

Miss Allison looked uncertain for a moment, then held out her hand with frank cordiality.

"Just at first I didn't recognise you, Mr. Duncan, but I very glad to see you again."

Duncan smiled grimly as he glanced at Miss Ainsworth. That young woman was perplexed and annoyed. What did Phœbe mean?

"I thought," she commenced desperately, knowing that she must bring matters to a crisis, "that you did not entertain a very high opinion of Mr. Duncan, that——"

And there she stopped, hopelessly bewildered by the genuine astonishment which she saw in Phœbe's Allison's eyes.

"I always liked Mr. Duncan, but we were never very well acquainted. I don't understand"—then catching the look on Margaret's face she broke off—"Margaret, ou must be thinking of Fred Dunton." Phœbe flushed warmly as she pronounced the name. "You have certainly got Mr. Duncan and Mr. Dunton mixed up. If I were Mr. Duncan I should not forgive you for that. Will you be at the hotel soon? I must go and get off my travelling dress before lunch. Come up to my room, won't you?" And Phœbe darted off.

Margaret started to follow her, but Duncan barred her path.

"Have you nothing to say? I am ready to listen to any apology that you have to offer."

"I beg your pardon, of course. Now please let me go."

"A moment please. Do you retract all your charges regarding Miss Allison?"

"Of course." She hesitated an instant, then added with a palpable effort, "I am very sorry that I misjudged you."

Duncan stood before her, immovable and stern.

"Your words came readily enough when you wished to convict me of a dastardly act. You seem to have very few with which to make amends."

"What do you wish me to say more than I have?"

"I can hardly tell you that."

She looked at him distantly for an instant, then some sudden thought flushed her cheeks a burning scarlet.

Duncan smiled a little bitterly but made no movement to speak.

It seemed to Margaret Ainsworth that she was living centuries in those few seconds. Why was he so merciless? Why didn't he help her if—if he really cared? But then she supposed he was too angry to care any more for her as he had. Couldn't he see that it was all a wretched mistake and that she had suffered from it as much as he?

The silence grew unbearable. Duncan would not break it. Margaret felt that she could not—still almost anything was better than the present situation.

"Is it worth while for me to attempt anything? You may possibly remember saying that you were thankful I had said 'No.' Since you feel that way it is of no use for me to offer any explanations."

"That is for you decide, of course," he returned in a perfectly emotionless voice. "If you think you have satisfied your conscience and made honourable amends I have nothing to urge."

"Then do not keep me here—let me pass."

"With pleasure."

Duncan stepped aside and Margaret walked by—but only a few steps. She wheeled quickly and held out both hands.

"You do not mean to forgive and forget?" she asked questioningly.

"What am I to forget?"

"If—if—if—you would forget that I had said 'No,' and——"

Duncan's arms were round her and his eyes and lips were telling her that everything was all right between them. In her great relief she felt her anger rising against him once more.

"Why didn't you help me, Dick? You were positively cruel. You almost made me ask you to marry me."

Duncan laughed teasingly.

"I owed you something, dear, but that was not the real reason. You were sure enough of my love. There was no question about that in your heart—but there was a great question in my mind as to whether you cared more for your pride than you did for me. I wanted to have that matter settled for ever."

"And you are satisfied?"

"Perfectly," replied Duncan, with a look of supreme content.

Mabel C. Jones.

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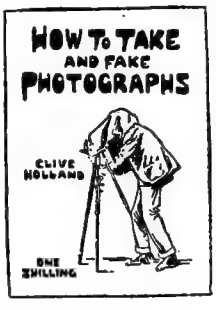

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THEIR ELOPEMENT.

Telling How it was Frustrated, Happily For All Concerned.

THE light was turned down in Rev. Mr. Hadley's study, and the man himself sat before the fire at one end of the room, but partly conscious, however, of the rollicking flames, for he was thinking over the line of his next sermon. A rap sounded at the study door. He had not heard the outer door open, and knew nothing of his caller until the knock came, and he turned to see a man standing in the doorway. He did not recognise him at first, but as he went towards him, turning up the lamp, he reached out his hand with the words:

"Ah, Thomas—good evening."

The man after the first greeting did not take the seat to which the minister invited him, but stood awkwardly fumbling with his hat. He wore a coarse suit and looked as if he did not feel at home in his present surroundings. Mr. Hadley saw his evident discomfort, and after waiting a moment for him to make known his errand, said kindly:

"Well, Thomas, what can I do for you?"

At this the other found his voice. "I—at first I didn't mean to say anything about it," he began, "and then—I thought you'd ought to know."

"What is it?" asked Mr. Hadley.

"It's—it's Miss Bess, sir."

"My daughter?"—in surprise.

"Yes—yes, sir," stammered the visitor. "She's planning to run off—elope, that is."

"What do you mean, man? Are you speaking of my daughter Elizabeth?" asked Mr. Hadley sternly.

"Yes, sir, and Ben Wilson. Him and her are planning to run off together."

The older man stood as if stunned; then rousing himself, he said slowly:

"I don't understand."

"Well, you see, it's like this," resumed the other. "I was going over to Brantwood this afternoon, and I took a short cut through the woods that's off to the left o' the bridge, you know, and all of a sudden I heard somebody talking. I hadn't made no noise, and so they didn't know anybody was near 'em, but what I heard 'em say made me stop and listen for more. I ain't given to listening to what's none o' my business, Mr. Hadley; but I thought at first that somebody was planning a robbery, and then—I soon see it wasn't no robbery after all, but an elopement, and I looked through the trees and see 'twas Ben Wilson and Miss Bess."

"Are—are you positive, Thomas, positive it was an elopement they were planning?" Mr. Hadley put the question calmly, but his face was white and drawn.

"Certain, sir, or I wouldn't have told you. It's to-night."

"To-night?"—with a start. "Are you sure they said to-night?"

"Yes, sir, at ten o'clock, and there ain't much time to lose if you want to catch 'em."

Mr. Hadley looked at the clock. It was nearly half-past nine. "Elizabeth went to her room an hour ago," he mused; "she said she had a headache."

"Very likely," nodded the other.

"Doubtless we had better start at once. I thank you, Thomas. Perhaps you will direct me to the place you speak of."

There was an appeal in the older man's words to which the other responded promptly.

"Pleased to go with you, sir. You'd better put on your overcoat," he said a moment later, when they reached the outer door; "these evenings is gittin' chilly."

Mr. Hadley paused to take a coat which was hanging in the hall, and the two went down the steps in silence. Little, indeed, was said during their half-mile walk. Thomas in a vague way felt the incongruity of his position, while the other was busy with his own thoughts. His little Elizabeth! Could it be possible that it was of her this man had spoken?

"My poor, motherless child," Mr. Hadley's thoughts ran; "how have I been remiss in my duty? Would that your mother had lived, she might have saved you from this folly. Would you, indeed, leave your father's house and go away with that—that boy? Ah, a little of the wisdom of the serpent is sometimes best. It may be—if I had not forbidden him to come to the house—forbidden fruit is always sweetest—I have erred, no doubt, and because I did not fancy the young man—it may be I have blamed him for the misdeeds of his father. It may be if I had taken pains to become better acquainted with him, I should have found him other than I judged him, might have seen him with Elizabeth's eyes, as it were. But now—is it too late to help the matter?"

Henry Hadley had married somewhat late in life, and a few years later his wife had died, leaving him a year-old daughter. But the child with her flying, yellow hair and dancing, dark eyes he had never quite understood, and during the sixteen years since his wife's death, he had watched her growing up before him, fair to look upon, no doubt, but, as he told himself, Elizabeth's child would have looked fair to him in any case, and having her mother's name, must she not develop something of her mother's character?

She had usually been ready enough to obey him, save for a momentary pout or flash of self-will, after which her subdued penitence was a charming thing to see. He had never dreamt her capable of deceit, and when to-night she had gone early to her room, he did not for a moment doubt she had the headache of which she spoke, yet when this man—this comparative stranger—had come to him with his strange story, he had

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not thought of questioning his truthfulness, had not given his daughter so much as the benefit of a doubt, had not even gone to her room to ascertain whether or not she had deceived him. For a moment the father blamed himself, yet he did not falter in the way he was going. He felt—something assured him—that the man spoke the truth, and coming soon to where a horse was harnessed to a light cart, it did not in the least surprise him.

Thomas grasped the minister's arm. "That's his horse," he said in a whisper.

"Hush," the other returned. "Let me go on alone."

A few steps and he came in sight of two figures dimly outlined; they were going towards the waiting carriage. There was a low murmur of voices and then one more distinct. "My daughter," it said.

The two figures paused suddenly as if rooted to the ground, and there was a dead silence.

"Elizabeth—Benjamin—come back to the house and be married; then you can go away if you wish."

The minister spoke firmly, there was no trace of anger in his voice; yet had a thunderbolt fallen from Heaven, the two young people could not have been more terrified. The girl grasped her companion's arm.

"Ben—oh, Ben, what shall we do?" she sobbed.

Ben himself, however, was equally at a loss.

"Come, my children; it grieves me that you should go away to have the marriage service performed when I can do it for you. You have a carriage, Benjamin; kindly take Elizabeth back to the house; you will find the door unlocked, and I will be there soon."

The young man hesitated, while Bess, with a hysterical laugh, said:

"We might as well go back."

They entered the carriage, turned in the direction of the vicarage, and had gone on for several moments in silence before it occurred to either of them that Mr. Hadley was walking, and the thought of the man, no longer young, trudging over the half mile of dark roadway while they rode, gave them a curious feeling; besides, how did he know that they would not go on to Brantwood as they had planned?

As Mr. Hadley and Thomas parted a little way from the house of the former, the clergyman reached out his hand.

"Good-night, Thomas," he said, with his air of simple dignity. "I shall not forget what you have done for my daughter and myself. For the present, I can only say that I thank you."

When he re-entered his study where the two young people were awaiting him, the fire had died down. He went towards the fireplace and put some fresh sticks of wood upon the coals, remarking as he did so:

"If I had known we were to have a wedding here this evening, I would have tried to have the room brightened up a bit."

Bess' pink cheeks grew carmine in the firelight and she looked up at her father questioningly, while Ben moved uneasily. Mr. Hadley sat down and covered his eyes with his hand for a moment, while the old clock in the hall ticked with painful distinctness—that and the crackling fire were the only sounds. Presently the clergyman looked up, and putting on his spectacles began:

"Other things aside, I presume you would as lief have me perform the marriage service as Mr. Robbins, of Brantwood?"

Bess and Ben exchanged a startled glance, but the latter found voice to answer:

"Certainly, sir."

"Therefore we may as well proceed. I—I suppose you have your marriage license?"—looking over his spectacles at the prospective bridegroom.

The young man glanced over at Bess, and then, with a feeling of foolishness quite evident in his looks, stammered:

"I—we—of course—that is—not yet!"

"Do I understand that you have not procured a license?"

"I have not—yet."

"How old are you, Benjamin?"

"Nineteen," answered the unfortunate owner of these years.

Mr. Hadley nodded gravely.

"Is it asking too much to request you to wait till to-morrow? We can probably arrange matters by that time."

The clergyman looked from one to the other over his spectacles, while Bess looked appealingly over at Benjamin. As for the young man, he just then felt no need of the bright wood fire; he was quite warm enough and equally uncomfortable; but, meeting the girl's glance, he asked:

"What do you say, Bess?"

"We'd better wait, I suppose," she answered slowly.

Another silence followed, broken at length by Mr. Hadley.

"My children," he hesitated, "it grieves me that you should have so little confidence in me. It grieves me that I should have fallen so far short of my duty as to make that confidence impossible.

"Elizabeth, you have chosen this man, and if your heart's love has gone out to him, God forbid that I should come between you. And my—my son, the love of a pure woman is a thing of which a man may well be proud. It is a thing not to be taken lightly, and when that love is returned by the man to whom it is given, marriage—which is, as it should be, a sacrament—gives to it a dignity which, alas, too many fail to comprehend. It is not for a day, a year, but for life. No greater blessing can come to you than such a love as I am constrained to believe Elizabeth has for you, and that you reciprocate her feeling, I, too, am bound to believe. Such a love her mother brought to me."

Mr. Hadley was silent for a little while, while Bess and Ben sat vaguely uncomfortable; they did not look at each other, and the bright colour had gone from the girl's cheeks.

"The years have gone so quickly," he went on again. "I had not realised that my little daughter was a woman, with a woman's heart and feeling. And yet, if your lives are spared, there are many years before you ere you reach middle life."

For some time longer he continued speaking, while the two before him listened in silence. When the young man rose to go, he looked from the girl to her father hesitatingly, and at length said somewhat clumsily:

"If—if you'd rather put it off, Bess—perhaps you'd rather—arrange things, you know."

The girl seemed to understand, for she replied:

"We might wait—a week."

"Good-night," said Mr. Hadley. He did not offer to go to the door with the young man, but with a bow, including both him and Bess, left the girl to see him out. Their adieux were brief, for a moment later she came back to her father. She stood a moment in silence, then with a burst of tears sank down beside him.

"Forgive me," she sobbed. "I didn't know how—how good you are."

"God knows your happiness is dearer to me than my own," the clergyman returned gently, adding: "It would have grieved your dear mother to have had you married elsewhere than in your own home."

Later, when they parted for the night, father and daughter understood each other as never before.

Ben came round the next day, looking rather foolish, it must be confessed; of this, however, Mr. Hadley did not seem to be aware, but greeted him in a friendly manner, and after conversing for a few minutes on impersonal subjects, invited him to call often, that they might become better acquainted, and went to call his daughter. He told her to make such preparations for the wedding as she thought best; really he understood such matters so little himself.

"We have decided to put it off till next month," Bess told him a day or two later.

"Indeed. You are sure it is your own wish, Elizabeth?"

"Yes," she answered, and gave him a glance which might have meant one of several different things.

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For a while Ben called every day, then two or three days passed when he did not come in.

"I—I hope I do not keep him away," Mr. Hadley remarked, looking anxiously at his daughter.

"Not at all," she answered; "he comes once a week."

At this the father regarded his daughter with a glance as doubtful in meaning as hers had been a little before.

One evening, as father and daughter sat together in his study, he asked after a pause:

"By the way, Elizabeth, when is that wedding coming off?"

The girl's face flushed, paled, and flushed again before she answered:

"I think it isn't coming off."

"My dear, do you mean——"

But the girl's arms were round his neck.

"Shall you be dreadfully disappointed if you never have a chance to marry us at all?" she asked.

The man pushed the girl gently back where he could see her face. "Elizabeth," he said, "is it so?"

"Yes, it is so," she returned. "We find that—I don't want him, and he doesn't want me—so we've given it up; wouldn't you?"

"Are you sure you have ceased to care for him?"

"Dear me, yes. Do you know—I was really tired of the sight of him when he came so often. I don't think I ever cared much; I only thought I did, just because you didn't want him to come here, I suppose?"

"If that is so, then you are not sorry that I interrupted your plan?"

"Sorry!" The girl laughed and then grew suddenly sober. "Papa," she said, "if you hadn't, I'm sure I should have regretted it all my life."

When a few years later Mr. Hadley performed the marriage service at his daughter's wedding, the groom was a man of a very different type from Benjamin Wilson, and as for that person, he was married the year before that.

Edwin Matthews.

"Shall you marry him, Alice?"

"It's manners to wait to be asked," returned Alice.

"Hasn't he asked you?" persisted Will Cable.

"That would be telling," Alice Marsh replied.

Then she laughed up at the young giant leaning over the back of a high chair, and regarding her with a look at once quizzical and puzzled. He was just as gentle, as retiring, as shy as ever. And yet the world had great things to say of his wisdom, his indomitable pluck in the face of distressing obstacles, the lofty scientific value of his researches and discoveries. He had been interviewed and lauded. The critics were unanimous in his praise. And here he was—just the same delightful fellow of five years before.

Carriage wheels had stopped before the door. They could hear the servant crossing the hall. "Mr. Reginald Raymon," announced the man.

Mr. Raymon, bland and placid, round-faced, round-eyed, hat in hand and monocle in eye, made his appearance.

He had come to take her to the theatre. He intended to lay his heart and his vast fortune at her feet that very evening.

Later they were driving slowly homeward through the silence, the crispness, the blueness of a perfect February night.

His arm slipped confidently round her waist.

"The gods could give me nothing—unless you were theirs to give."

"Ah!" she said softly. She moved a little until she was free from his arm. "You—you are quite sure——"

That was just where Raymon's bad quarter of an hour began.

"Sure? Indeed, yes. I have not spoken hastily. I have given the matter—a weighty one, as you will admit—due consideration." He adjusted his monocle. He wished the coachman would drive more slowly. "I recollect what I owe to my family, to my position, to—if I may say so—to myself."

"Yes," sighed a tender voice. "Oh—yes."

"And I have made up my mind that you are the only woman I shall marry—you!"

He could feel again the tremor of the slender shape near. He put out a fat little hand. His touch was not tentative by any means. It was determined. There was no false modesty about Raymon. In the gloom of the carriage he almost forgot the charm, the beauty, the power of the girl. All these were engulfed in his own superb condescension—a condescension of which she was aware. Her choking voice when she spoke proved that.

"And I have decided it is you—you whom I have chosen for—my wife!"

"You have"—how overwhelmed she was—"not spoken rashly?"

"My mind is irrevocably made up!"

"You are sure you will not regret——"

He cut short the faltering voice. "Your timidity is uncalled for, dear. I never change my mind. When shall it be?"

The carriage door swung back. Raymon walked with Miss Marsh up the steps.

"Don't come in!" she intreated sweetly. "I have an engagement. And—I'm very sorry, you know—and very grateful for the honour, of course, but I couldn't care for you—that way. Thank you—ever so much."

Then, her cheeks scarlet, her lips apart, and breathing hard, she was in the library—was facing a man who had risen from his low chair in the light of the dying fire.

"Well?" he questioned hoarsely. He came slowly towards her. "Well? He proposed to-night. I knew he would. Get it over, for Heaven's sake! When is it to be? When are you to give yourself to any man's arms?"

She went straight towards him. Her colour had suddenly gone. She was as white as the roses she carried. And her cheeks were wet and shining in the firelight.

"Whenever you will take me!" she said.

Kate M. Cleary.

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LOST AND WON.

Relating How Eva Carleton Lost a Race but Won a Heart.

THEY walk together, ride together, play lawn-tennis together, often as not dine together, and dance together; in fact, they are "good friends."

Yet the world throws many barbed shafts at them, questioning the perfect friendliness in which they have enveloped themselves as with a cloak. It is contrary to the world's sophistry that a man and woman fashioned in youth and beauty should live in daily and hourly intercourse with each other without some deeper, more tender sentiment being born of such companionship. This infatuated couple call it good fellowship. They do not heed the arrows of the world's cynicism.

An old mother, infirm, almost bedridden, and a lover, who is also her cousin, in Australia constitute the girl's domestic ties.

The man is alone in the world. A babe struggling lustily with his nurses, a boy measuring his will against his masters', a man running counter opinions, and adopting heretical doctrines in direct opposition to the world's cherished creed and code of laws. This is Ben Scarlett, late Captain of the 71st Lancers.

Eva Carleton lends a ready ear to his tales. She is engaged to be married, but the engagement does not prey heavily on her mind. She seldom hears from him, and never writes herself. So there are no obstacles in the way of the friendship which commenced three summers ago. They are leaning now upon the stone balustrade of the terrace, as goodly a couple as were ever created.

A young moon is shining in her pale innocence above their heads, looking down upon them from a bed of daffodil sky.

"It is going to be a lovely night," observes Captain Scarlett, blowing a cloud of smoke from between his lips. "Pity you do not smoke, Eva; it is the one pleasant thing we cannot enjoy in common."

"A pity you don't relinquish the pleasure then," the girl says, laughing. "I gave up needlework because you declared that it fretted you to see me indulging such a namby-pamby taste."

"You used to prick your fingers," is his laconic observation.

"Smoking makes your teeth black," she retorts quickly.

"What's the odds as long as you are happy? I am quite contented with the knowledge that my teeth are whiter than most people's."

The girl looks steadily at him. It is a glance perfectly innocent of coquetry; she is not to blame that her eyes are large and clear.

"Ben, are you conceited?" she asks, in a frank tone.

"Nothing so womanish," he replies, holding the cigar between his teeth while he speaks.

"It is hardly fair of you to sneer at my sex—hardly friendly, is it, Ben?" a touch of hurt pride jarring in her voice.

"Heavens! no, it is not!" Captain Scarlett admits warmly. "You cannot help your weakness any more than I can help my strength. Why did not the Fates ordain that you should be a man, Eva? Your firm will, courage, plucky principle, each and all are deserving of a better shrine than that of a woman's weakly body. I wish you had been a man, Eva."

The girl does not answer for a moment; and there falls a silence of human speech while summer sounds—the tinkling of a carter's bells, the lowing of cattle, the drowsy twittering of the feathered multitudes of songsters—follow quickly on each other.

At last a few words drop heavily on the human silence.

"We have been very happy as we are. My friendship has not failed to satisfy you because I am a woman, or at least you have given me no cause for believing so hitherto."

"I have not—I will not."

When they speak again it is in an entirely different strain.

"You should tell Berry to carefully uproot the weeds which I observed among the strawberry-beds; they are multiplying fast."

"I will remember."

"And now I must be off. I am dining at the Reddingleys'." Shall I meet you there?" he added, as an after-thought.

"No; they have not asked me to-night," she tells him in a slow, laboured fashion.

"No? Well, good-bye, then!"

And away he swings down the flight of stone steps. Arrived there he looks up. Eva is standing exactly as he left her, with her elbows resting on the balustrade; his eyes meet her downbent ones. There is a curiously soft expression in them—an expression strangely unfamiliar to Ben Scarlett; it must be the effect of the pale young moonlight.

"Remember, to-morrow—at ten sharp," he calls out, and before she can nod back in reply he is gone.

* * * * *

At ten sharp Miss Carleton is standing in the old-fashioned oak hall waiting for her horse to be brought round from the stables. At half-past ten she is cantering across country with Ben Scarlett, and a straggling groom in the rear.

"What did you do at the Reddingleys' last night?" Eva asks, breaking a long spell of silence.

"Ate a good dinner, drank plenty of dry champagne, discussed peaches and politics; then adjourned to the drawing-room, here I listened to indifferent music, talked and—and"—hestitating—"that is all."

"No, it is not," laughs the girl, flicking the mare's neck idly with the reins.

Ben Scarlett looks round sharply at her.

"Eh?"

"You forgot to wind up with your usual adjective," she reminded him.

"An omission on my part; but as it happens, I was not

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bored last night." Then, perhaps thinking that he has said enough, he sets off at a brisk canter.

The tower clock is striking twelve when they turn into the dusty high-road.

"Beastly clock! I will be bound that it is wrong," Captain Scarlett remarks. "It made me half an hour late for dinner last night."

"And so you owe it a grduge?" Eva says, with a strange questioning look.

Ben Scarlett does not answer. There is something amiss with the bridle of his smart, tall roan. He dismounts to attend to it.

"Here comes the Reddingleys' carriage," the girl informs him. "I always recognise it some distance off, on account of the coachman's brilliant red hair."

"Eh? Really!" laughs Ben, swinging himself up in his saddle again. "Yes, it is their carriage. 'Talk of an angel,' you know the rest."

The "angel" on this occasion is leaning back against the cushions of the carriage in solitary languor. A shot-blue silk sunshade protects the exquisite fairness of her face from the sun's inquisitive golden gaze. She moves it slightly to one side, perhaps to give better point to the sweeping bow with which she favours Ben.

"How—d'ye do, Captain Scarlett?" murmurs the sweet, drawling voice, and away rolls the carriage, leaving a cloud of dust behind it.

"Who—is—she?" inquires Eva.

"A Miss Barron. Cousin of the Reddingleys'. Met her there last night," Ben jerks out in short sentences.

Miss Carleton wastes no more words; she canters the mare the whole way home.

Arrived at the gate she holds out her hand to the Captain.

"*Au revoir*, Ben; you will come round this afternoon?"

"I think not—the fact is, I have promised the Reddingleys to turn in there for tennis."

"Oh, very well!" with studied indifference. "I shall take the mare round to the stable now. Don't let me detain you. Good-bye!"

* * * * *

A slight young figure, clothed in a brown-holland gown, with a bunch of purple heartsease pinned just under a very round, very white chin. This is the first human thing that Captain Scarlett's black eyes rest upon as he turns in at the wicket-gate leading from the fields to Miss Carleton's ancestral halls.

Now, Captain Scarlett's conscience smites him, in that he has not paid the girl even a flying visit for a week or more.

How will she receive him?"

He is not left long in doubt, for Eva holds out her hand as usual; and a moment later they are discussing the relative merits of the new litter of fox-terrier pups as though their intercourse had been unbroken.

"How is the mare?" inquires Captain Scarlett hastily, when the subject of the fox-terriers is getting somewhat threadbare.

"Lively."

"Have you ridden her lately?"

"Every morning."

It is not easy to carry on a conversation when one receives only monosyllabic replies. Ben desists; the effort is too stupendous. He falls to staring at Eva in silence, watching the sun play hide-and-seek in the gold of her hair. Pretty hair—pretty head, bright, burnished, sleek—the sort of head fitted to find a resting-place on some man's honest heart.

"I do not mind being stared at in reason; but that sort of thing can become an agony when too prolonged. Let me direct your attention to some other object."

The black eyes never flinched.

"Since when have you grown averse to being looked at?" inquires the owner of the offending orbs.

"Since you have grown so pertinacious," replies Eva with grave lips, but a smile sunning itself in her eyes.

"Remember, I have not seen you for a week," Ben says; and the next minute he repents him of the speech.

Miss Carleton regards him with an air of cold astonishment.

"Whose fault is that?"

"Mine; and I am prepared to state that I do not regret my voluntary absence. You have become all the lovelier in my eyes for the comparison with other women. Now, let us change the subject, as it seems to vex you."

"Come indoors; it is cooler there. I believe the sun is affecting your brain," Eva says pityingly.

Ben smiles provokingly.

"Thanks—no; I prefer remaining out here. With your permission, I will light up," producing a cigar from the region of his pocket. "Coming for a ride this afternoon, Eva?"

"Yes."

"How mighty stiff and cool you are, child?"

"Am I?"

"Yes. What is it?"

"Nothing!"—feebly.

Ben does not make another attempt to reinstate himself in her confidence, and, betaking himself off presently, leaves Miss Carleton to solitary meditation.

* * * * *

"Ben, have you ever contemplated the possibility of falling in love?"

This question is a distinct breaking through of the laws and habits of speech which have been set up between them.

Ben feels it to be so, and favours the girl with a long, cool gaze of astonishment. His answer, when it comes, is evasive.

"With whom?"

"Must I single out some person? Then I will choose. That cousin of the Reddingleys—Miss Barron."

The afternoon has been passed in silence. Alternately they have trotted and cantered beside one another, but spoken hardly once. This outburst on Eva's part is as unexpected as it is unwelcome to Captain Scarlett. He does not take any pains to conceal this.

"Heavens, Eva! what goose-chase have you started now? Why choose Miss Barron of all persons?"

"I could think of no likelier person;" then, with an awkward forced laugh: "You would not have me substitute myself."

"It would be less improbable," dryly from Ben.

"Nonsense! We are only friends. It is rather late in the day to begin to fall in love with each other," laughing.

"Friends be hanged!" ejaculates Ben fervently.

It is a full minute before Miss Carleton recovers her breath after this sudden *douche* from her impetuous companion.

"Well, as you will not become interested in your future prospects, let us discuss mine."

"By all means," assents Ben.

"Have you ever contemplated the possibility of my being married?" she inquires, again turning her face away from her companion towards the fair green meadows with their harvest of daisies and buttercups.

"What are you driving at?" exclaims Ben in open wrath.

"You know that I am engaged?"

"Yes; and think no more of it than you do," scoffs the Captain, and when he sneers he looks almost forbidding.

"But we must think of it now. I heard from Davis this morning."

"Did you? You must send him about his business."

"After five years?"

"Look here, Eva," facing round upon her with a steadiness of resolve difficult to com-

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bat, "you do not love the man, and never have; you should not have permitted yourself to become engaged to him; luckily, it is never too late to mend the folly of our ways."

"Yes, it is. What reason could I give him for my broken faith?" pants the girl in excessive agitation.

"Why should you give him one at all?"

"Oh, Ben, is that how you would choose to be treated?" exclaims Eva reproachfully.

Captain Scarlett straightens his shoulders with an air of mighty superiority.

"How proud you are, Ben!"

And so the conversation ends.

"Come, let us race each other home," she cries presently. "If I win you shall present me with a pair of new stirrups. If I lose you shall become the happy possessor of the smallest and sweetest of the fox-terrier pups. Agreed? Then—one, two, three, and aw—ay—whoop! Halloa!"

The mare darts past the roan like a winged bird.

"A—race—by—road!" shouts Ben, after the girl.

But she never turns her head. Straight as a die, she gallops on for the length of a mile, then swerving suddenly, leaps a gate, and so turns on to the pasturage.

Scarlett follows, not too closely, for he wishes Eva to win her stirrups.

"Do you think Bonny will take that wall?" Eva calls out, pointing with her whip to the object in question.

"Better not try," returns Ben.

Disaster sometimes overtakes the wilful woman; it overtakes her this time in the midst of youth, beauty, and garish day.

When Ben Scarlett clears the wall he finds Eva and the mare huddled together on the green meadow-grass, among the buttercups and daisies. The mare's head is resting heavily on the breast of her mistress' blue habit, while Eva's head has found a harder, more hurtful resting-place.

It is Ben's wont to be cool and calm in the face of danger. He maintains his equanimity now. The first thing to be done is to relieve Eva from the pressure of the mare. This is not a simple task; but in less than five minutes Ben Scarlett has accomplished it.

Eva's head now rests upon the breast of his rough tweed coat; he strokes it tenderly with one big brown hand, the pretty shining head he was foolish enough to have romanced over that morning. The few hours which have since elapsed have not cured him of the folly.

"Poor little Eva—dear little woman!"

At this unfamiliar mode of address the great blue eyes open and gaze around in pitiful bewilderment.

"Where am I? What has happened?" and then lifting her voice in a sudden cry, she calls out: "Bonny, oh, tell me—she is not hurt!"

"I believe not; she is only too frightened to stir just at present," Ben answers gravely; "but you, Eva—forgive me if I am more interested in your injuries than Bonny's?"

A wave of scarlet rushes headlong into the girl's face as she listens to the exquisite tenderness of his voice.

"In me, Ben?" she repeats, moving her soft cheek uneasily against his rough coat.

"Yes, in you, my darling—my——"

But with a sudden movement she lays her hand upon his lips.

It is evident that whatever injuries she has sustained they are bodily, for she is in full possession of her senses.

"Do you think you can move, Eva? Are you in pain?"

"No—o," she answers slowly; "I feel no pain; but I am afraid to stir lest I might. There's a confession of cowardice for you!" laughing rather hysterically.

"You must try to be brave, Eva, for my sake," he adds, with a shade of red appearing through the bronze on his face.

For his sake! Why should he have said that?

And yet the suggestion has a marvellous effect, for the girl struggles out of his arms, and a minute later is standing before him, upright, tall, and beautiful.

"Ben, I have lost my stirrups!" with another attempt at a laugh.

"And I have lost something more valuable to me," observes Ben oracularly. "I wonder whether you would prize it if I offered it to you!"

"Offer what you have not got!" raising her brows in a feigned astonishment.

"Nay; because I have already bestowed it on you. Will you keep it, Eva?"

The girl's quick perception is not at fault. She understands; but for answer veils her face with her trembling fingers, and bursts into a passion of tears, while, unheeded, Bonny whinnies for assistance.

* * * * *

After all, nobody is invulnerable in this world, and Ben Scarlett was not destined to prove a brilliant exception.

He succumbs to Cupid's mesmeric influence, and Eva, being the weaker vessel, yields even more entirely, for she flings pride and her plighted troth to the four winds of Heaven, and marries the man who won her heart even while she fondly cherished the belief that they were only *good friends.*

J. Cameron.

Mrs. Hayseed: "Where did you learn that new piece?" Daughter: "It isn't a new piece. The piano has been tuned."

Miss Gossippe: "Do you pay much attention to what your husband says?" Mrs. Jealous: "Not unless he talks in his sleep."

Angry Wife (after a quarrel): "Seems to me we've been married about a hundred years. I can't even remember when or where we first met." Husband (emphatically): "I can. It was at a dinner-party, and there were thirteen at table."

"You are worth your weight in gold to me, darling!" he murmured. "Then do go home early, Percy, dear," she replied wearily. "I've lost ten pounds since we became engaged, just sitting up late with you. We can't afford such extravagance."

"So you are having your house re-decorated, Mr. Hawkins?" "Yes, the workmen began last week." "Are you making radical changes?" "Yes—very." "What is to be the main feature of the new house?" "You—if you'll consent!"

Jack: "I have a chance to marry a poor girl whom I love, or a rich woman whom I do not love. What would you advise?" George: "Love is the salt of life, my friend. Without it, all else is naught. Love, pure love, makes poverty wealth, pain a joy, earth a Heaven." Jack: "Enough. I will marry the poor girl whom I love." George: "Bravely spoken. By-the-way, would you—er—mind introducing me to the rich woman whom you do not love?"

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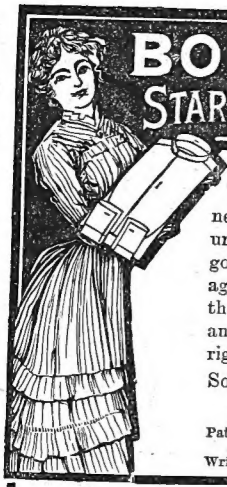

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Rejected—No Reason.

"JARO" is in an unpleasant position. He has been "keeping company" with a girl for three years. They had a little quarrel, and parted, but made it up and met again. During the parting, the girl's father was taken ill, and this served as an excuse for her not to meet him so frequently. Latterly, he was asked to cease correspondence with her until she asked him to resume. The next step was taken by her sister, who wrote asking him to cease correspondence altogether, as the girl is now keeping company with another young man, with the full consent of her parents. This young man is in a better position than "JARO," but my correspondent feels that he has been spurned in a most unjust manner, as he has done nothing wrong to deserve it.

* * * * *

I should write to the girl herself, or call and see her, asking whether it is by her own wish that you have been asked to cease relations with her. If so, then, of course, as there was no engagement, you must consider the affair at an end. I should not, however, accept the rejection at any other hands than her own. It seems clear that the quarrel you had, though it was made up, left an unpleasant feeling behind, and that she has ceased to care for you as a result,

A Queer Question.

SOME of my correspondents will forgive me if I tell them that they make me smile. "W. A." writes: "Can you inform me through your column of the etiquette regarding kissing? I am in the habit of visiting my *fiancée* at her home, and should be glad to know the correct number of times that I should kiss her."

* * * * *

What a question! As if, "W. A.," there were anything "correct" with regard to kissing. And as if any lover fixed the number of kisses by rules of etiquette! What I should say would be, don't kiss her more than a dozen times when there are a large number of people present, as they would wonder how many times you kissed her in private, and you should never let people wonder. As a matter of fact, it is not strictly correct to kiss your sweetheart at all in the presence of others, save when greeting and parting, as that is a thing to be done privately. As to the number of times you might kiss her in private I should say not more than ten thousand. You would not like her rosebud lips to be worn out, I am sure.

The Lover Who is Laughed At.

"I AM a very serious young man," writes "FIDO," "but my young lady always treats me as a huge joke. She laughs at the way I pronounce words, and never understands my thoughts when I express them. She does not see that this treatment makes me very unhappy. If, however, I show that I am annoyed she only laughs all the more. What ought I to do?"

If you are going to marry this young lady, I see that you have a lot of unhappiness in store unless you seriously cultivate a sense of humour. Perhaps it is not born in you, but you should try to acquire it. Try reading light books and papers, and drop that serious manner. Many men are very serious in their heart of hearts, but are most merry dogs in the society of others. The man that wears his seriousness openly has always been a laughing stock, especially with the fair sex.

Friendship With a Senior.

"I HAVE a great friendship," writes "NINETEEN," "with a lady ten years older than myself. At the same time, I do not feel that I love her. She always makes me see the best side of life, and I can tell her things which I would not confide to many others. Is this the kind of woman who would make a good wife for me? Are our ages too different?"

* * * * *

Yes, your ages are not suitable. It is quite natural for a youth to be attracted by a woman very much older than himself, but that is not the kind of attraction which we call love, or which makes for happy marriages. Keep her friendship as long as you can, but the girl for you to marry should be nearer your own age. Besides, I don't suppose for a moment your friend would hear of a proposal from you. Few women of thirty or thereabouts would allow themselves to look ridiculous by marrying so young a man as yourself.

Naming the Day.

"BETROTHED" writes: "My lover presses me to name the day for our wedding, which he wishes to be very soon. I don't like to tell him, but my parents are by no means well-to-do, and the cost of a wedding would be a great drain on my father's pocket. In another year, it may be better, but it would be most difficult at present. At the same time, I do not wish my lover to know that this is so, as my father would lose reputation if it were known that he is pressed for money. I should like your advice."

* * * * *

It is certainly an awkward position. Still, it is a sacred right of the girl and her parents to fix the date of a ceremony, and it is always understood that a man waits on the convenience of the girl's parents in the matter. You need not tell your lover the reason why the wedding cannot take place just yet. Just tell him that it is not convenient, for family reasons. If you cannot tell him this yourself, ask your father or your mother to convey it to him, as then he will have to abide by their decision.

A Stormy Sweetheart.

"MY lover," writes "M. R.," "is always telling me he loves me, and seems very devoted to me, but he has a most fearful temper, and if the least thing upsets him, he calls me some fearful names, and then his language is the reverse of nice. Do you think he can really be so fond of me as he professes? It worries me very much."

* * * * *

Perhaps, "M. R.," it is only his little way. After all, it is often better to have a sweetheart whose temper is short, and soon over, than one whose annoyance spreads over weeks, months, and perhaps years. He certainly ought not to use the language he does, but that is not such an important matter as the character which underlies it. If you really love him, and he loves you, you should condone his little outbursts, and hope that in time he will get over them.

Cynthia

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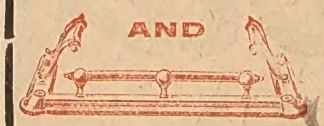

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